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## God is His Own Interpreter, and He Will Make it Plain

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*"God is his own interpreter, and He will make it plain"*

**"He who does not increase his knowledge decreases it." (Aboth  
i.13)**

**"Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind."  
Ralph Waldo Emerson**

**"It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion..."  
Ralph Waldo Emerson**

**"A man must consider what a blindman's-buff is this game of conformity. If I know your sect, I anticipate your argument. I hear a preacher announce for his text and topic the expediency of one of the institutions of his church. Do I not know beforehand that not possibly can he say a new and spontaneous word? Do I not know that, with all this ostentation of examining the grounds of the institution, he will do no such thing? Do I not know that he is pledged to himself not to look but at one side,--the permitted side, not as a man, but as a parish minister. He is a retained attorney, and these airs of the bench are the emptiest affectation."  
Ralph Waldo Emerson**

**An educated person is one who has learned that information almost always turns out to be at best incomplete and very often false, misleading, fictitious, mendacious - just dead wrong.  
Russell Baker**

**As one may bring himself to believe almost anything he is inclined to believe, it makes all the difference whether we begin or end with the inquiry, "What is truth?"  
Richard Whatel**

## **Why this study? The Necessity of Criticism**

*The truth, indeed, is something that mankind, for some mysterious reason, instinctively dislikes. Every man who tries to tell it is unpopular, and even when, by the sheer strength of his case, he prevails, he is put down as a scoundrel.* H.L. Mencken<sup>1</sup>

**While God waits  
For His temple to be built of love  
Men bring stones.**  
Rabindranath Tagore

John Wesley once received a note which said, “The Lord has told me to tell you that He doesn’t need your book-learning, your Greek, and your Hebrew.”

Wesley answered “Thank you, sir. Your letter was superfluous; however, as I already knew the Lord has no need for my ‘book-learning,’ as you put it. However—although the Lord has not directed me to say so—on my own responsibility I would like to say to you that the Lord does not need your ignorance, either.”<sup>2</sup>

Man seeks to explain the cosmos: it is his unabandonable quest in which his own mind is endlessly and persistently creative. Each age, according to its own best lights, arrives at its favorite answer; and each answer, no matter how absurd (man alone is permitted the privilege of absurdity), is a part of that scaffolding of thought whereby he builds the cathedral of Knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

Religion is founded upon this cathedral of learning so far as it is founded upon truth and the *knowledge* of truth. The Bible is a written communication from Heaven to man, and must be read in order to be understood, believed and obeyed. To withhold from the myriads the means of reading and understanding the Book of God—the volume of human destiny—is the greatest sin of omission of duty to God and man that any community, acknowledging the Divine authority of that volume, can be guilty of.<sup>4</sup> As Oliver Wendell Holmes stated, “*Truth, when not sought after, rarely comes to light.*”

Religion, in its mystical, emotional or practical expression is, to me at any rate, of little value if divorced from intellectual integrity.<sup>5</sup> I think that the reason “many believers” are so repulsive is that they don’t really have faith but a kind of false security. They operate by the slide rule, and the Church for them is not the body of Christ but the poor man’s insurance system. It’s never hard for them to believe because actually they *never think* about it.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately the reality is simply that it is not easy to get vast

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Woods, Jr., *33 Questions about American History you’re not supposed to ask*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Osborne & Woodward, *Handbook for Bible study*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979. 13-14.

<sup>3</sup> Ernest R. Trattner, *The Autobiography of God*. (Charles Scribner’s Sons: New York, 1930), p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Campbell, “Baccalaureate Address to the Graduates of Bethany College,” *Popular Lectures and Addresses*. Nashville: Harbinger Book Club, n.d., 507.

<sup>5</sup> Burnett Hillman Streeter, *Reality: A new correlation of science and religion*. London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1926. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Ellsberg ed., *Flannery O’Connor Spiritual Writings*. Marynoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012. 81.

masses of men to think in advanced terms.<sup>7</sup> To turn slowly away, step by step, from theologies which one has cherished, which were vital and are vital to friends past and present, to feel that these theologies are now but the skeletons of religion, this cannot be done without mental anguish. With all his “enlightenment” there are still times when modern man must long to hear even old Triton blow his wreathed horn or for the stately dogmatic mansion which the souls of the fathers built. Still, as a tortoise cannot dwell in the dry shell which its father shed but must grow a shell of its own—so much we!<sup>8</sup>

Let’s be honest—the controversies that exist in the Christian church are a source of trouble and perplexity to every thoughtful mind. Theologians have everywhere been the enemies of analysis and new ideas, and in whatever field they have appeared—feeling, quite correctly, that, once admitted, there is no setting limits to them.<sup>9</sup> Akin to the intellectual stagnation in the old South, many theological circles have put a ban on all analysis and inquiry, a terrified truculence toward every new idea, a disposition to reject every innovation out of hand and hug to the whole of the status quo with fanatical resolution.<sup>10</sup>

Originally, the word “heretic” had little of the sinister meaning that was later attached to it. But it was gradually melted down into a fanatical weapon which, according to the contemporary language of orthodox theology, was used to designate any doctrine held to be “unsound, false, and eternally wrong.”<sup>11</sup> It might naturally be supposed that those who profess to follow one and the same Master, to venerate one and the same Book as the final court of appeal in matters pertaining to religion, would agree on all questions of faith and ecclesiastical order; but this is far from being the case.<sup>12</sup> Thus, who is the heretic?

There were expositors of the Scripture in the Church long before Christians were divided into Roman Catholics, Greek Church, and Protestants. Which of them shall we follow? Shall it be Origen or Chrysostom, Jerome or Augustine? The answer that the Church of Rome, in common with all other Churches, has to give is that no interpretation of Scripture by an individual, however learned, are to be regarded as infallible; all that can be done by the authorized leaders of the Church is to indicate a certain line of faith, ecclesiastical order, and practice, according to which the Bible *ought to be interpreted*, (emphasis mine) and by which all commentators ought to be guided and tested.<sup>13</sup>

I’m a strict believer in the scientific principle of believing nothing, only taking the best evidence available at the present time, interpreting it as best you can, and leaving your mind open to the fact that new evidence will appear tomorrow.<sup>14</sup> Because of this attitude **there is a need for each individual to study the Bible for themselves, or else be prepared to take someone else’s opinion.** In the 1600’s Faustus Socinus, in his “Catechism of Rakow” made the following observation: “Let each one be free to judge

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<sup>7</sup> Ernest R. Trattner, *The Autobiography of God*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1930. 118.

<sup>8</sup> G.B. Foster, *The Function of Religion in Man’s Struggle for Existence*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1909. 134.

<sup>9</sup> W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991. 98.

<sup>10</sup> Cash, 98.

<sup>11</sup> Trattner, 135.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Baker Girdlestone, *Girdlestone’s Synonyms of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Girdlestone, 14.

<sup>14</sup> [www.publicspeakingproject.org](http://www.publicspeakingproject.org), 7-1.

of his own religion, for this is the rule set forth by the New Testament and by the example of the earliest church. Who are we, miserable people, that we would smother and extinguish in others the fire of divine spirit which God has kindled in them? Have any of us a monopoly of the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures?"<sup>15</sup> It would be well to remember that what is invisible is what God sees, and it is precisely that which the Christian must look for.<sup>16</sup>

Originally it was written in a context of ancient times in another language for other people. It reflects customs that differ from our own, and its message may well be foreign to the understanding we bring to it. For many reasons we need to proceed with diligence, thoroughness, caution, and rigor if we wish to glean from the Biblical text the message its authors sought to convey; otherwise, we risk imposing our views on it instead of discerning its claims on us. The scriptures can be twisted, distorted and slanted. When this happens they may be used to undo the very purpose of God who gave them. When the written word is so wrested as to defeat the purpose, plan and prayer of the living word, something is indeed seriously wrong.<sup>17</sup>

It is necessary that we should have a thinking people. Boswell tells us that Goldsmith once said: "As I take my shoes from the shoemaker, and my coat from the tailor, so I take my religion from the priest." There are many who are like that; and yet religion is nothing unless it is a personal discovery. As Plato had it long ago: "The unexamined life is the life not worth living," and the unexamined religion is the religion not worth having. It is an obligation for a thinking man to think his way to God.<sup>18</sup> As Mark Twain once said, "Just because you're taught that something's right and everyone believes it's right, it don't make it right."

In Jesus' day and time, the Rabbis believed that studying the law and uncovering ever-new layers of meanings constituted genuine piety. The rabbis contended, therefore, that study of the Decalogue—in face of all biblical materials—might uncover the underlying rationale and purposes of Jewish law; such study represents the most vital act of the religious Jew. The rabbinic treatment of the Ten Commandments finds holiness in submission to rabbinic law as a system, to the rabbi as a sage, and to the entire corpus of rabbinic teaching, itself the ultimate object of study because of its status as God's ultimate gift to humankind.<sup>19</sup>

This concept of study is not something that, contrary to popular opinion, one gets theology right and then never has to open the Bible again. Any man who follows a profession knows that he dare not stop studying. No doctor thinks that he has finished learning when he leaves the classrooms of his university. He knows that week by week, and almost day by day, new techniques and treatments are being discovered; if he wishes to continue to be of service to those in illness and in pain, he must keep up with them. It is so with the Christian. The Christian life could be described as getting to know God better every day. A friendship which does not grow closer with the years tends to vanish with the years. And it is so with us and God.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Trattner, 138, 139.

<sup>16</sup> Ellsberg, 83.

<sup>17</sup> Carl Ketcherside, *The Twisted Scriptures*. St. Louis, Missouri, Mission Messenger, 1977. 30.

<sup>18</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976. 90.

<sup>19</sup> Roger Brooks, *The Spirit of the Ten Commandments*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990. xi.

<sup>20</sup> Brooks, 91.

Whether we like it or not -- **the Bible needs interpretation by each one of us.** It's our business to try to change the external faults of the Church—the vulgarity, the lack of scholarship, the lack of intellectual honesty—wherever we find them and however we can.<sup>21</sup> It is a strange reflection on God that in spite of all supernatural support, revelation still lends itself to confusion and ambiguity. Notwithstanding all that men have said and done, it has failed to furnish the world that safe and steady light it set out to guarantee. On the contrary, it has more often led men into wild wandering in dangerous and toilsome ways.<sup>22</sup> It is for this reason that while the seeking soul may find the basic message of the Bible in a single phrase or verse, like John 3:16, maturing believers are wise to proceed to a more advanced understanding of the Bible based on extensive study, careful analysis, and logical explanation in view of the full range of relevant evidence; nevertheless, the relevant question becomes “What is relevant evidence?” For many scholars items like the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the Bible's status as the Word of God, and the real presence of God in human affairs are highly relevant to how the New Testament ought to be read; however, it is precisely at this point that a great deal of our modern study disagrees. This brings us to another type of criticism – not just rigorous analysis, but analysis based on certain convictions quite different from many of our Christian predecessors.

There came a time in the seventeenth – and eighteenth century European history called the Enlightenment when “fundamental Christian beliefs” became “problematic.” The Bible began to be interpreted in the light of different, non-Christian assumptions which include the following:

- **The Church has misread the Bible.** Modern enlightened readers need to free themselves from church doctrine and interpret the Bible in the light of human reason alone.
- **Jesus Christ was not the divine Son of God.** He was a superior ethical guide and spiritual example. He taught about God's moral law, but not salvation through his death for our sins and his resurrection. These ideas were inventions of the early church.
- **Miracles in the New Testament, including Jesus' resurrection, can no longer be the basis for Christian belief,** since modern reason doubts that they happened as the Bible reports.
- **The Bible calls for ridicule, not reverence, since much of it is offensive to the modern mind.** In advancing this view writers like Voltaire, Tom Paine, and Thomas Woolston sowed seeds that helped destroy the Bible's privileged place in Western society by encouraging skepticism toward it.
- **The only legitimate way to interpret the Bible is the “historical” way.** By historical was meant that it was assumed that cardinal Christian doctrines were rationally unacceptable, that Jesus was no more than a mere mortal, that miracles

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<sup>21</sup> Ellsberg, 83.

<sup>22</sup> Trattner, 78.

should be rejected or at least radically reinterpreted – and that no other interpretation of the Bible, but this one, deserves personal acceptance and public recognition.

Needless to say it naturally occurred -- with such liberal logic being applied to the minds and souls of many Americans, by the nineteenth century, many scholars in Europe, and particularly in Germany, many were arguing for an understanding of the New Testament that flatly contradicted Christian belief of all previous centuries. “Historical criticism” in the Enlightenment sense had been born; “it laid the foundations on which modern biblical studies still rest.”

By the time of the industrial revolution there seemed to be a sense of release from the thought-patterns of the past. No longer did competent theologians seek to inject life where none exists. Dead ideas were being acknowledged as dead; and so into the museums these lifeless forms were being reverently carried, there to be deposited as a token of respect to the intellectual struggles of former generations.

And so it comes to pass that whereas the theological conceptions of the twentieth century are no longer those of the Dark Ages, the change may be attributed to this inescapable anthropomorphism: Like people, like God.<sup>23</sup>

In one form or another historical criticism is still very much with us. Books about the New Testament that insist on a “historical” reading of the scriptures often mean “historical-critical” and assert that the Bible is to be treated like any other book. The Bible’s central claims – as many believers over many centuries have understood them – are cast in doubt. Then new, or at least different, meanings are proposed.

Thus, you need to pay attention when reading the Bible, what someone else says that the Bible says, and how you study the scriptures. While the truth will set you free, misinterpretations have only clouded the true message and enslaved millions to doctrines that are aptly described in the text as those from “demons” (1 Timothy 4:1). It is not only good to know how to study but essential to know why you believe what you believe. If your faith is not your own whose is it?

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<sup>23</sup> Trattner, 119.

## Foreword

**“Behold, days will come—says the Lord God—when I will send a famine into the land: not a famine for bread, nor for water, but to listen and understand the words of the Lord. And they will wander from sea to sea and from the north to the east, they will grope around to search for the word of the Lord, and they will not find it. But on that day will the beautiful maidens and the young men faint of thirst.”**

Amos 8:7-13.

Those days have come. We live in an age when young people all over the world are searching for the ground of being, the spiritual reality which forms the basis of the universe. A part of this movement is also to search for one’s roots, universally, nationally and individually.<sup>24</sup> What answers does Christianity have for this audience?

As far as I’m concerned, Christianity, in large part, has missed the point. As George Bernard Shaw once said, “No man ever believed that the Bible means what it says: He is always convinced that it says what he means”. Ask any Christian what the main point of the Bible is and you’ll hear patented answers like, “Baptism”, “Repentance”, “Grace”, and an assorted number of other nice, safe answers that our theological positions—via. the pulpits, lectureships, synods, and colleges/seminaries—have led us to. Seldom do we ever ask “why” concerning any assortment of theological puzzles because we think that we don’t have the necessary intelligence; others have figured out the difficulties, and , thus, we don’t need to look any further. Many “liberal” Christians try to distinguish between how much intellectual and moral ground they concede to the adversaries of Christianity. This yes-but Christianity is in full intellectual withdrawal, and it is becoming less relevant.<sup>25</sup> However ignorant, and/or pugnacious we become, and absolutely correct we may think we are, we need only to see how simple our misunderstandings are of God, his word, and our theological positions to see that we need help.

Men are slowly learning that God does not send truth out of the skies wrapped up in a package. The only way to truth is through ordinary, normal human experience which patiently investigates the facts. For that reason modern-minded people no longer take seriously the claims of supernatural revelations. They have found it useless to rest experience upon phenomena which cannot be verified....”Nothing,” once declared an ancient teacher, “Is to be believed which is unworthy of God.”<sup>26</sup>

What was it that drew people to God in the first century? It’s really very simple: they saw, in the lives of those who claimed to follow him, a live God that was powerful and active. He was different from the warring, revengeful, fanciful gods of the Greek and Roman pantheons.

**“...I will put my law in their inward parts,**



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<sup>24</sup> Shimon Hurwitz, *Being Jewish*. Feldheim Publishers: Jerusalem, 1978. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Dinesh D’Souza, *What’s so Great about Christianity?* Regency Publishing, Inc.: Washington, D.C., 2007. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Trattner, 79.



**and in their hearts will I write it;  
and I will be their God, and they shall be my people...  
they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of  
them...for I will forgive their iniquity,  
and their sin will I remember no more.” (Jer. 31:33-34)**

This God was so alive and active that he empowered his followers with strength and resolve that wasn't seen in the religions of that ancient world. His kingdom was one that no man could touch but that all could become a vital part of.

**“I saw in the night-visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of  
heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of  
days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him  
dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and  
languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
which shall not pass away, and his Kingdom that which shall not be  
destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13, 14)**

When the message was on Jewish soil, the center of the message was Jesus because the belief in God was unnecessary to talk about. They had about three thousand years to work out all of the kinks (not to say that they did this perfectly), and their belief was solid: there was a God, and they weren't him (unfortunately there were a few exceptions to this rule, but those were few compared to the spiritually immature, pagan Gentile masses). Those who believed in Jesus asserted that there was a God, he was their Father, and that the only thing they needed to be sure of was that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Angels would help with any misunderstandings that the shepherds nearby would have concerning this concept with a new baby in town.

**“A virgin shall conceive and have a son, and shall call his name  
Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14)**

**“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government  
shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful,  
Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the  
increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the  
throne of David, and upon his kingdom to establish it, and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even forever.”  
(Isaiah 9:6-7)**

It's a message that couldn't be misunderstood – Immanuel: God was with us. The four Gospels hammer this truth over and over: if you won't believe in me because of my words just pay attention to what I've done (John 5:36; 10:35). This is the real gospel message. It has nothing to do with doctrine or commandments, for they had no meaning

and power without the reality of God being alive and actively showing men himself for who he really was. As Abraham Joshua Heschel puts it, this was *God in Search of Man*.

In the metaphor of the Amora Chiya bar Abba (ca. 280 C.E.) we find him comparing the influence that the study of the Torah exerts upon a man to the powerful action of the leaven. The Torah is said to contain leaven. Even if the children of Israel abandon God and, yet, they continue to occupy themselves with the study of Torah, the leaven of the Torah will bring the people back to God.<sup>27</sup>

They may even study Torah for the wrong reasons and abandon observance of God's commands; nevertheless, if they will keep themselves involved in studying the Bible, the leaven of the Torah, namely, its inner force and power, will bring the people back to God. In other words, *Torah possesses a compelling or irresistible energy*. Even if the people forsake God, when they study the Torah, its innate strength will influence them to return to God. They might study the law without the proper motivation. Moreover, though they have studied it, they may in error forsake its practice. Despite these scenarios, as long as the people do study the law of God, its leaven-like inner force will bring them back to the Lord. Learning Torah affords a great strength. The Torah has an inner force which is referred to as leaven. The leaven of the Torah will bring the people to the Lord.<sup>28</sup>

It is with this innate power, this inner force, this irresistible energy that Jesus began his ministry, in his hometown of Nazareth, when he read from Isaiah concerning the heart of his life and message:

**“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because God hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the year of God’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of God, that He may be glorified.”** (Isaiah 61:1-3)

The most important thing that Jesus ever said about himself was, “If you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the father.” It is my hope that the simple Gospel message doesn’t get clouded any further with bad study habits, bad exegetical practice, and horribly inept excuses as to why we have to continue to rely upon “scholars” from the past (and present) to do our thinking for us. If God works through his word, then God still desires to be united with us. It is possible to find this God, but you must first pick up your Bible and continue reading, praying, studying. If you prayerfully enter into this study it could change your life, your faith, your destiny. It’s up to you! The real message of the interior of the Bible won’t be gained unless you decide to roll up your shirt sleeves and

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<sup>27</sup> Brad Young, *Jesus and his Jewish Parables*, Paulist Press: Mahwah, NJ, 1989. 211.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

dig into the eternal richness that God has placed before you. Is it worth it? Examine the following scriptures and see if you think that God believes so.

*Wisdom cannot be found on earth*

- 12 But where shall wisdom be found?  
and where is the place of understanding?  
13 Man does not know the way to it,  
and it is not found in the land of the living.  
14 The deep says, "It is not in me,"  
and the sea says, "It is not with me."

*Wisdom cannot be bought*

- 15 It cannot be gotten for gold,  
and silver cannot be weighted as its price.  
16 It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir,  
in precious onyx or sapphire.  
17 Gold and glass cannot equal it,  
nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold.  
18 No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal;  
the price of wisdom is above pearls.  
19 The topaz of Ethiopia cannot compare with it,  
nor can it be valued in pure gold.

*Wisdom cannot be found in the underworld*

- 20 Whence then comes wisdom?  
And where is the place of understanding?  
21 It is hid from the eyes of all living,  
and concealed from the birds of the air.  
22 Abaddon and Death say,  
"We have heard a rumor of it with our ears."

*God alone knows wisdom's place and he established it in creation*

- 23 God understands the way in it,  
and he knows its place.  
24 For he looks to the ends of the earth,  
and sees everything under the heavens.  
25 When he gave to the wind its weight,  
and meted out the waters by measure;  
26 When he made a decree for the rain,  
and a way for the lightning of the thunder;

27 Then he saw it and declared it;  
he established it and searched it out.

*God grants wisdom to men*

28 And he said to man,  
“Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;  
and to depart from evil is understanding.”<sup>29</sup>

*The Speech of Wisdom*

*Proverbs 8*

1 Does not wisdom call,  
Does not understanding raise her voice?  
2 On the heights beside the way,  
in the paths she takes her stand;  
3 beside the gates in front of the town,  
at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud.

*Wisdom calls to the sons of men and describes herself*

4 To you, O men, I call,  
and my cry is to the sons of men.  
5 O simple ones, learn prudence;  
O foolish men, pay attention.  
6 Hear, for I will speak noble things,  
and from my lips will come what is right;  
7 for my mouth will utter truth;  
wickedness is an abomination to my lips.  
8 All the words of my mouth are righteous;  
there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.  
9 They are all straight to him who understands  
and right to those who find knowledge.

*Wisdom is more valuable than gold and silver*

10 Take my instruction instead of silver,  
and knowledge rather than choice gold;  
11 for wisdom is better than jewels,

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<sup>29</sup> George W.E. Nickelsburg, and Michael E. Stone. *Faith and Piety in Early Judaism*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983. 205,206.

and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

*Wisdom describes herself and her role among men*

- 12 I, wisdom, dwell in prudence,  
and I find knowledge and discretion.  
13 The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil.  
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.  
14 I have counsel and sound wisdom,  
I have insight, I have strength.  
15 By me kings reign,  
and rulers decree what is just;  
16 by me princes rule,  
and nobles govern the earth.  
17 I love those who love me,  
and those who seek me diligently find me.

*Wisdom is more precious than wealth and gives men riches*

- 18 Riches and honor are with me,  
enduring wealth and prosperity.  
19 My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,  
and my yield than choice silver.  
20 I walk in the way of righteousness,  
in the paths of justice.  
21 Endowing with wealth those who love me,  
and filling their treasuries.

*Wisdom was the first created being*

- 22 The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,  
the first of his acts of old.  
23 Ages ago I was set up,  
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.  
24 When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
when there were no springs abounding with water.  
25 Before the mountains had been shaped,  
before the hills I was brought forth;  
26 before he had made the earth with its fields,  
or the first of the dust of the world.

*Wisdom was present with god in the acts of creation*

27 When he established the heavens I was there,  
    when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,  
28 when he made firm the skies above,  
    when he established the fountains of the deep,  
29 when he assigned to the sea its limit,  
    so that the waters might not transgress his command,  
    when he marked out the foundations of the earth,  
30 then I was beside him, like a master workman;  
    and I was daily his delight  
    rejoicing before him always.  
31 rejoicing in his inhabited world,  
    and delighting in the sons of men.

*Wisdom's final call to men*

32 And now, my sons, listen to me:  
    Happy are those who keep my ways.  
33 Hear instruction and be wise,  
    and do not neglect it.  
34 Happy is the man who listens to me,  
    watching daily at my gates,  
    waiting beside my doors.  
35 For he who finds me finds life  
    and obtains favor from the Lord;  
36 but he who misses me injures himself;  
    all who hate me love death.<sup>30</sup>

## One Final Thought

Socrates was approached by a man who kinda-sorta off-the-cuff mentioned in a rather detached, dispassionate manner that he would like to have the wisdom and knowledge that Socrates possessed.

So Socrates did the obvious thing. He walked him down to the ocean and pinned the guy under water until he nearly drowned the poor slob.

After the man said “What are you doing?” Socrates asked him, “What do you want?”

“Air!” replied the man. “Air!”

To which Socrates replied, “Good. As soon as you want knowledge as much as you want air you will have it.”

*How desperately do you desire God's knowledge?*

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<sup>30</sup> Nickelsburg, 207-210.

R. Yochanan walked from Tiberias towards Sepphoris and leant on R. Chiya b. Abba's arm. They passed a field. He said: That field belonged to me, but I sold it so as to occupy myself with the Law. They passed an olive garden. He said the same. They passed vineyard: He said the same. Then R. Chiya wept and said, What have you left yourself for your old age? He replied, Does what I have done seem foolish in thine eyes? *I have sold what was created in seven days, but I have acquired what was given in forty days.*

The Torah was to the Rabbis the pearl of great price. This was no accidental discovery but one purposeful and intense. This "law" contained, as it were, the Kingdom of God within itself. By studying and serving the Torah, by practicing it and fulfilling its laws, the Israelites both accepted and took upon himself the glad yoke of the Kingdom; the widened the range of the Kingdom, and in the eschatological sense he brought the advent of the Kingdom nearer.<sup>31</sup>

How near do you want to be to understanding God and the Kingdom? Isn't it time to think instead of simply relying on what you feel? Anyone who toils over the study of Torah is bequeathed both majesty and splendor.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> C.G. Montefiore, *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings*. New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1970. 254.

<sup>32</sup> Scherman, Nosson and Mei Zlotowitz ed. *Tehillim*. Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1995). 264.

## Biblical Exegesis and Hermeneutics

*We should never desert a great principle in theology any more than in science because of apparent difficulties which we are not able at present to remove.*

*J.C. Ryle*

“The only cautionary remark I would add is this, that without faith, and the Spirit’s aid (never withheld from the humble and prayerful Christian), AND A PATIENT EXAMINATION OF THE CONTEXTS, no one can profit aright from this Concordance.”<sup>33</sup> So cited George V. Wigram in his original 1843 edition of *The New Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance*. This warning was intended for each student of the scriptures to note the importance of their task.

The “word of God” is powerful and dynamic. It is no mere “articulate sounds or series of sounds which, through conventional association with some fixed meaning, symbolizes and communicates an idea” (Webster’s Dictionary). It is the living reality of God, making itself available in, through, and under what we so cheaply call “words.”<sup>34</sup>

**“He [Moses] was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mt. Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.” Acts 7:38 NIV**

**“Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.” Deut. 32:46-47 NIV**

God has clearly commanded that everyone must live by every word that has proceeded from Him (Matt. 4:4). It is a rebellious thought that some have, that God’s words to man may be studied, or may not be studied, according to one’s own will. When a person discovers that God has written that each person will be judged by the words of the Bible, and how one has lived by them (Jn. 12:48), it becomes logical that this new

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<sup>33</sup> *The New Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance*. Hendrickson Pub.: Peabody, Mass, 1984. Preface.

<sup>34</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Intellectuals Don’t Need God and Other Modern Myths*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993. 19.



concept will lead that person to determine to learn the meaning of all those eternal words. Surely, all the riches of Heaven, more than anyone can now conceive, await the ones who make it their life's work to study God's word in order to show themselves approved by God (2 Tim. 2:15; Acts 8:30, 31).<sup>35</sup>

Christianity is Christ-centered, not book centered; if it appears to be book-centered it is because it is through the words of Scripture that the believer encounters and feeds upon Jesus Christ. Scriptures is a means, not an end; a channel, rather than what is channeled.<sup>36</sup>

God has clearly commanded that everyone must live by *every word* that has proceeded from Him (Matt. 4:4). It is a rebellious thought that some have, that God's words to man may be studied, or may not be studied, according to one's own will. When a person discovers that God has written that each person will be judged by the words of the Bible, and how one has lived by them (Jn. 12:48), it becomes logical that this new concept will lead that person to determine to learn the meaning of all those eternal words. Surely, all the riches of Heaven, more than anyone can now conceive, await the ones who make it their life's work to study God's word in order to show themselves approved by God (2 Tim. 2:15; Acts 8:30,31).<sup>37</sup>

The responsibility of a Christian to know and to obey God's word is a fearful one. "The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance, it is the illusion of knowledge."<sup>38</sup> It is for this reason that Paul noted to the Galatian brethren that, "Anyone who receives instruction in the word much share all good things with his instructor" (Gal. 6:6). While "all good things" may seem rather a vague reference, its first echoes are of the Torah itself, given by the Good, to the good, as their good, to do good. In this sense, Paul is encouraging the Galatians to read Scripture as he has taught them, the "word" also calling forth Jesus' status as the "Logos" (Jn. 1:1ff; 1 Jn. 1:1f) and his presence with people gathered together in study.<sup>39</sup>

It is overwhelming to think of the consequences of thinking that one knows the will of God and, in reality, doesn't know God's word in all its variety, in all of its mysterious and august meanings. Without diligent study, it is impossible to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). Because of this thought Jews, in the days of Jesus, were charged to study the Torah that represented the wisdom of God. In some sections of Judaism today this quest continues. Without this grace and knowledge, the basis of faith, it is impossible to please Him. If there are those who hang on every word of a mere man in order to inherit an earthly fortune, how much more important it is for God's sons to give rapt attention to his words. He has written to form the very ladder-steps we must ascend to gain the spiritual riches our God and Savior Jesus Christ has purchased for His own.<sup>40</sup>

If, then, it is so important that we know what God has said to our hearts, it must needs be true that *Christians must not rest on men's interpretations of God's words*. The

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<sup>35</sup> McGrath, 19.

<sup>36</sup> McGrath, 21.

<sup>37</sup> The New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance, Preface.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen W.Hawking, "Quotes by Stephen W. Hawking." Good Reads. GoodReads.com, n.d. Web. 01 Nov. 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Shulam, and Hilary Le Cornu. *A Commentary on The Jewish Roots of Galatians*. Academ: Jerusalem, Israel, 1977. 401.

<sup>40</sup> Shulam, 401.

church should be a research center, a truth laboratory, the headquarters of a divine exploration society. We are indebted to every person in the world who shares a truth with us, but we must ourselves become explorers of God's rich domain and bring to light those concepts which will brighten the world.<sup>41</sup> To believe that there is any *final authority in the words of any man* is a principle alien to true Christianity. Jesus Christ would not commit Himself to man and neither should any of His beloved saints. **"No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy was not at any time borne by the will of man, but having been borne along by the Holy Spirit, holy men of God spoke"** (2 Peter 1:20,21). A complete demonstration of the meaning of God in each word, and the practice which is commanded to us personally, may be gained only from the interpretation of the Holy Spirit given inwardly. It is His practice to reveal the glories of His word to those who through faith seek to study those words, with a mind to obey them and to praise Him for them. Success in understanding the holy scriptures, and gaining adequate knowledge, requires constant review and continuous application—even if a difficult concept must be analyzed a thousand times.<sup>42</sup> This is the reward of a diligent study and search of the Scriptures. An eternity of existence hangs in the balance; each one of us must carefully be on guard that no intermediary may come between us and our God as He is revealed in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>43</sup> No one can tell you what God wants to tell you. The root of successful study is not supernatural—it is within the grasp of anyone who expends the proper effort.<sup>44</sup>

**"The commandment is neither beyond your understanding nor is it far away. It is not in the heaven...nor is it beyond the sea...but the word is very near to you: in your mouth and in your heart to perform it."**  
(Deut. 30:11)

As God commanded Joshua (1:8): "You should contemplate it day and night," so too He commands us to devote time to studying his scriptures every day and every night. As the hours of learning accumulate, stores of knowledge are acquired.<sup>45</sup> The more thoroughly we study the Bible in a right spirit, and on just principles of interpretation, so much the more closely shall we draw near to one another in faith and life.<sup>46</sup>

Those with such a spirit will soon discover that each and every word of the Bible is a rare jewel. Each one is carefully placed in its own setting, so as to reveal in its prisms the never-fully-discovered facets of God's glory. "...when you received the word of God which you heard from us you accepted it not as the word to men but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe." 1 Thess. 2:13 NIV

To pretend that any single word of the Scriptures that God has so carefully written out for us is not worthy of our attention is to prove without question that such a pretender

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<sup>41</sup> Carl W. Ketcherside. In the Beginning. (Mission Messenger: St. Louis, Mo.) 41.

<sup>42</sup> Rabbi Michael L.Munk. The Wisdom in the Hebrew Alphabet. Mesorah, Pub.: Brooklyn, New York, 1983. 50.

<sup>43</sup> Ketcherside, 41.

<sup>44</sup> Munk, 50.

<sup>45</sup> Munk, 51, 52.

<sup>46</sup> Gridlestone, 15.

is a fool. “Is not my word like fire,” declares the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces.” Jeremiah 23:29 NIV

If one would play marbles with diamonds... if one would put emeralds and rubies in his flower-pots... if one would laugh at the idea of extracting gold from the ore at his feet, kicking the chunks away; would we not conclude that such a person must be a fool, or out of his mind? Even so those who do not now recognize the inconceivable value of each of God’s words must one day be recorded as witless, warped and woeful, and those who recognize them for the priceless gems that they are will surely seek to dig them out, uncover them in all their beauty, and then to make each one of them his own, so that they will become a bright and brilliant light on his pathway to Heaven.

**“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”**

Isaiah 55:10, 11 NIV

Anyone who has read the Bible through and through many times knows that each reading reveals further meanings to the words God has given us. The unsearchable riches of God are buried in the depths of His words. A serious student of the Bible soon discovers that there is great authority in the words of God on the face of them, but once the depths of these words are plumbed, they take on even more authority, and our use of them brings forth more fruit because there is more certainty and authority in our use of them. It is to be remembered that it is the usage that God sanctions that will count when He judges everyone on that great Day of Judgment.<sup>47</sup>

It is during such excursions or “mining” into the words of God that excursions of excitement and discovery happen. These are the moments when the shades of ignorance (humanity) are lifted for a moment – an eureka experience happens (I have found it!) -- and if not grasped immediately is lost like water running through our fingers and never regained. The moistness remains for a while, but the substance is gone and so is the invigorating, pulsating, life-giving matter that feeds the soul and makes every day not only worthwhile but something to be eagerly anticipated. If a new sense be discovered for a text, though it is opposed to the interpretation of a whole torrent of sacred doctors, it may be accepted, provided it be in accordance with the rest of Scripture.<sup>48</sup>

The Queen of Ethiopia’s treasurer was asked by Philip (Acts 8:30) whether he “knew”, “grasped”, what he was “reading”. That we have to give the distinction its full Rabbinic force is plain from the continuation: “Then Philip opened his mouth and, beginning at the same text (from Isaiah), preached unto him Jesus.” In Rabbinic language, “To open one’s mouth”, as a rule shortened into “to open”, frequently denotes “to open a lecture on Scripture” or even “to lecture on Scripture.” It was such “mining” that led this treasurer to go away rejoicing because he had “found Jesus Christ.” It wasn’t

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<sup>47</sup> Ketcherside, 41.

<sup>48</sup> Girdlestone, 14.

an accident and required an inquisitive mind, and a teacher that was led by the spirit of God with no hidden agendas, no deep pockets to fill or any elders to answer to.

The difficulties in “biblical studies” are simply the difficulties that beset men who confide themselves to casual observations. Observations, as in nature, must be multiplied, checked out, cultures researched, words dug into, finding the relationship of the parts to the whole, and all with a holy cautionary creeping into the presence of God.

The pages to follow are a result of such an “eureka” experience in my life. I know what you’re thinking. Having been raised in a conservative “church of Christ” background, having gone to a “church of Christ” college, and preaching and working in a “church of Christ” atmosphere all of my adult life would lend me, one would think, to an adoption, wholesale, of “church of Christ” theology, hermeneutical approaches, and buying into certain concepts that are deemed the “property” of the “church of Christ”. Nothing could be further from the truth. I have found something so invigorating, so life transforming, so imbued with spiritual energy that if I did not write it down, I felt that not only was I simply “hogging” a revitalizing experience that has changed my life, and the way that I look at God, his son Jesus, and the body on this earth that tries to imitate them, but one in which I would have to answer for on the day of judgment. Thus, reader, I ask you to read this material, toss what seems spurious, and take what will draw you closer to the one who created you.

In the “churches of Christ” we take great pride in announcing that we are part of “The” Restoration movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century led by great men of faith such as Alexander and Joseph Campbell, “Raccoon” John Smith, and Barton W. Stone. These pioneers did seek for an “undenominational” answer to their faith that they saw as going back to the scriptures for insights. Though they never endorsed this “awakening” as a “restoration” movement many of their followers did. It is important to understand what theologians mean when they talk about “restoration.” We would all like to see the Church “restored” to what it was in the first century. It would be good to restore the zeal of the first believers, the righteousness of their lives, their willingness to follow Yeshua the Messiah no matter what the cost, their being filled with the Holy Spirit, their eagerness to pray, their assurance and experience that God performs miracle sin response to faith. But are there external aspects of the first century believers’ lifestyle that we should set out to restore? Are there aspects of doctrine that they would have accepted, but which later believers have ignored? And if so, which ones? And what should we do about them?<sup>49</sup> What these rhetorical questions pose comes down to one central thought: we ought to start by making every effort to understand the text of the New Testament as its first century hearers would have understood it and applied to their situation in life. In the same way the only way to take the scriptures and make it meaningful in our lives is to understand it to the best of our ability and then apply it to our own situation in the appropriate way.<sup>50</sup>

When studying some material on Ralph Waldo Emerson, for a high school class that I taught in American Literature, I ran across some quotes that seemed to be pertinent and revealing as to why this study is imperative. Emerson said, in his seminal essay entitled “Self-Reliance” that “Perception is not whimsical but fatal.” He believed that what we feel and what we see are the very attributes of who we are. This is what life is

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<sup>49</sup>Stern, 11.

<sup>50</sup>Stern, 11.

made up of, and we'd better attend to it. In short, how we look at the world is who we are. We're constantly thinking either of what's to come or what has come. *Seldom do we live in the present.* "Man postpones or remembers. He does not live in the present, and with reverted eye laments the past or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future." It is from this posture that we must be liberated, to learn to live in the present, to see the world around us by the light of the soul. It's not easy to be true to one's inner light, one's inner resources. We need a guide; we need someone who knows the truth, the way, and the life. While we have such a leader it seems that what has been left of him is virtually forgotten or overshadowed by thoughts and walls that have been pondered over already. No longer is his word a living stream – it's more like distilled vinegar that is fed to us in doses that perpetrate the religious group that we're affiliated with. Don't ask – don't tell!

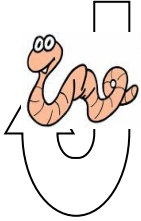
For this reason Emerson would later insist, in the same essay, that one should, "insist on yourself, never imitate." Shakespeare would have Polonius state the same advice to his son Laertes in "Hamlet": "To thine own self be true." In these short, concise statements both Shakespeare and Emerson explains why this material is not solely the result of my religious background within the halls of the "church of Christ", but that it builds more on my personal search for the truth of the scriptures. I have tried not to imitate; I have rejected certain items that some of my teachers instructed me in; I have even rejected some "scholarly" advice and directional approaches because of the slavish or servile constraint that it placed me in. I must be true to the one who created heavens and earth -- anything else stifles me. Whoever buys into such a crutch that allows others to lead you as a lamb being led to the slaughter (one not questioning why), is one who is reliant upon those who have come before – those whose knowledge must be higher than mine: those whose words must never be challenged -- I reiterate a single word from Ebenezer Scrooge: Humbug!

***Theology is no more than a day by day search of Gods word;*** it's a stream that has to be constantly replenished or else run the risk of becoming a stagnant pond that does nothing more than breed mosquitoes and disease. "If a man claims to know and speak of God and carries you backward to the phraseology of some old moldered nation, in another country, in another world, believe him not." Why? It comes with the old trappings that so and so said it and it must be true. Do you really think that by teaching Shakespeare you are going to make another Shakespeare? Who taught so and so to have this thought? Are you talking about Luther, the Catholic priest who went against the heavily ensconced Catholic Church, or John Wycliff, John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, John Knox, Ignatius Loyola, Jonathan Edwards, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, or Barton W. Stone? Who taught them that rebellion against the theology that had been taught them was the idea whose time had come? *There has never been a reformation that was not sparked by heretics.* The heroes of today are the heretics of yesterday, thus a heretic is one who has not yet waited long enough. One generation stones the prophets to death while the next gathers the stones and pile them up as a monument so their memory will live.<sup>51</sup> Is it any wonder that their breaking away and thinking for themselves led to movements that still affect us in Christendom today?

Where is this attitude today? Is this search solely for those in their ivory theological towers that read the classical languages and speak in hushed tones? No, the

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<sup>51</sup> Ketcherside, 39.



time has come, in this era of knowledge, that the “common man” arise and learn what tools are available and begin challenging the “sacred cows” of whatever denominational group that they’re a part of. Truth is discovered and is found only after long and arduous sacrifice and effort. Others, almost without effort, seem to be kicking about and there it is; at least that seems to be the point of the parable of the flawless pearl and the story of a man walking through a field and inadvertently coming across treasure.

How do you know it’s true if it’s not part of your own search for direction from God? We need to quit swallowing every worm that’s dangled in front of us as if it’s Gospel truth. Question, ponder, go out on a limb – but, isn’t that dangerous? Can’t we be led astray into doctrines of demons and be deceived not only by our own desires but our lack of expertise in how to study this book? Yes, it’s possible. But it’s also possible on any hike to be bitten by a snake, for any swimmer to drown, for any driver on the highway to be involved in an accident. It hasn’t stopped us yet in doing those things, and we understand the dangers. Why then should it stop us in our quest for meaning in our life and understanding the mind of the creator of the heavens and the earth? The time for pitiful excuses has ended, and the moment of truth as to why we do it, or not, be faced.

In “Self-Reliance” Emerson would ask, “Why should you keep your head over your shoulder? Why drag about this corpse of your memory, lest you contradict somewhat you have stated in this or that public place. Suppose you should contradict yourself, what then?” And he then goes on to these famous lines: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines.” Saying what is desired to be said, the old tune of theology already thought through, that which no one questions – is this what Bible study is? Where is the life, the excitement, the hungering and thirsting after God? Is it really as boring as we’ve been led to believe? Is the Bible only a dust covered leather book that looks exceptional as a coffee table covering, but has no practical use for my excavating in and finding something more enlightening that’s possibly never been seen before? Has it all been found? Are there no more diamonds in the rough? Has the gold all been mined out of “them thar hills?” Whatever metaphor works, the question is as valid as it is revealing. We might read a little, but we don’t study.

Our “Bible Studies” have become more a holding pattern than anything else. Simply circling the theological safe circle of theology already decided upon and backing it up seems safe and secure. It seems that God doesn’t want us to simply hold the fort but to storm it. Our task is to climb walls not build them. If you make of yourselves divine researches in the word of God, you may yet recover for us some glowing bloom of truth, and there will be one less flower “born to blush unseen and waste its fragrance on the desert air.”<sup>52</sup> Years ago, after a lesson that a woman disagreed with, she stormed up to me while I greeted everyone and said, “You mean to tell me that my Grandfather was wrong in teaching me that?” I simply retorted, “Mam, unless his name was Jesus Christ the possibility does exist.” I didn’t make a new friend that day. Bible classes should be launching pads to put us into orbit and not allow them to become simply feeding stations where we come to fill ourselves on the food which others have processed, growing lazy and torpid because of the ease of picking up that which others have scattered. The mind must be exercised if it, like the rest of the human body, becomes strong, and this means that it must be taught the art of meditation, a word which, in Hebrew, means “chewing

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<sup>52</sup> Ketcherside, 48.

the cud.” Just as a cow regurgitates the food she had collected in her first stomach and chews it over and over to drive every particle of nourishment from it, so we must recall the things which we have studied to mull them over in a serious fashion and extract from them every bit of precious meaning. The sheep of God, like all other sheep, were intended to be ruminants, and only as we ruminate upon truth can we survive.<sup>53</sup>

Emerson continues in this revealing study of self by saying, “With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words, and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said today. ‘Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood.’ (He says) Is it so bad, then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood.”<sup>54</sup> So, today I believe one thing -- tomorrow another -- so what? Is it being wishy-washy, or is it searching, probing, discovering something more than I gained yesterday? Yes, as Emerson put it, to be misunderstood, as someone that takes no firm stand, is a possibility. It’s easy to throw rocks at those that are misunderstood -- those who don’t climb into the rut and travel the same path that thousands before traveled, those who find it easy to be laughed at and referred to as out of the main stream of thought. The company already mentioned is a proud Hall of Fame to be a part of because of their contributions to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness on so many levels. They thought “outside the box” and because of it were condemned, poisoned, crucified, excommunicated...misunderstood!

“There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction... that *imitation is suicide*; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till.”<sup>55</sup> The mind of the student, when he begins the study, is a comparatively blank sheet. But most of us bring to the study of Christian history a number of conclusions already formed. We tend to beg the question before we examine it.<sup>56</sup> Of this we must be cautious. The less scripture that we understand, the more susceptible we become to manipulation by shysters and false prophets.

We don’t choose our talents; we don’t choose our body; we don’t choose our parents or family. We do choose what to do with what we’ve been given. What is the plot of ground that has been given to you to till? As life instructs us, there isn’t a level playing field out there. Some have the Cleaver family in which the harshest arguments are simple disagreements, and the sternest disciplinary measures are a word or look from the parents; the worst possible scenario for food is hotdogs. For many others those concepts are only seen on TV because their reality is so different and, in many ways, tragically so. So here’s the question: with what you’ve been given...what are you doing? We can all make excuses and watch time go by as quickly as the sand drops in the

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<sup>53</sup> Ketcherside, 48.

<sup>54</sup> Arnold Weinstein. *Classics of American Literature*. Chantilly, Virginia: The Teaching Company, 1998. 80.

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.emersoncentral.com/selfreliance.htm>

<sup>56</sup> Edwin Hatch. *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1890. 26.

hourglass, never to be regained – it's just lost. It's easy -- it's a road well traveled -- it takes little thought . Or will we travel, as Robert Frost stated in his poem, "The Road Not Taken" this way?

"I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference."

The world is taking new shape every day. Divinity is moving, metamorphosing, being relocated. We too move with it. That's what it means to live in the now. That's what self-reliance means; to keep attuned, keep in touch with that flow. Any particular human interpretation of religious truth, if it is to serve its end, must provide for the spiritual needs of which its peculiar generation is sensible. A religious system which cannot escape itself so as to meet the needs of a society which undergoes radical secular change, is doomed to extinction, even though it may for a time continue to drag out a formal but lifeless existence. Of this, the old Roman state religion provides a good example.<sup>57</sup>

The time for ignorance and self-assurance resting on the knowledge of others has passed. This is the age for enlightenment; this is the age where God can move in the width and breath of our world finding those who hunger and thirst for him. But theology that does not possess the minds and hearts of those who bow at its altar will not move them to sacrifice their hearts, their lives, and their sacred fortunes. Your task, if you desire to accept it, is to keep reading this manuscript and see if the suggestions that follow can be implemented and with prayer allow you to touch the hem of the garment of God. **It's your task because "Young lions may want and hunger, but those who seek Hashem will not lack any good."**<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> W.R. Halliday, *The Pagan Background of Early Christianity*. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, inc., 1970. 3, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz, eds., *Tehillim: A New Translation with a commentary anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic sources*. New York: Mesorah Publications, 1995. 413.



## **The Necessity of Criticism**

*“Amidst the flood of dangerous reading, I plead for my Master's book; I call upon you not to forget the book of the soul. Do not let newspapers, novels, and romances be read, while the prophets and Apostles be despised. Do not let the exciting and sensual swallow up your attention, while the edifying and the sanctifying can find no place in your mind.” J.C. Ryle*

There is a desperate need to study the Bible. Originally it was written in the context of ancient times -- in another language -- for another audience. The word of God was not delivered neatly packaged and tied with a ribbon. It was the divine response to human situations. It did not create needs and then proceed to meet them, but circumstances existed, and the will of heaven was revealed to relate to them. We are obligated to determine as nearly as we can the situation which gave rise to the revelation, and study it in the light of the circumstances.<sup>59</sup>

The “advantage of the Jew” – which removes him/her from the status of “gentile sinners” – is to be found first of all in Israel’s entrustment with the oracles of God (cf. Rom. 3:1,2). As the history of the Jew in the Hebrew scripture shows, Torah-observance alone, without the proper intention, is insufficient to gain entrance into God’s Kingdom.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, while study is needed so is the proper guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. Without God’s help, human beings lack the capacity to be faithful to him out of their own resources.<sup>61</sup> If one is to understand Holy Writ, it is incumbent upon us to study diligently and PRAY for guidance and wisdom as to how to apply the material that we find within its pages. This is difficult for a number of reasons. The Bible reflects customs that differ from our own, and its message may be foreign to the understanding we bring to it. Christianity came into being within the Roman Empire and formed a constituent element in the life of a great civilization which it gradually permeated. Though the early Christian might be at war with society, he was yet inevitably a part of it. It is, therefore, equally permissible to regard early Christianity against the background of its temporal and spatial setting, emphasizing, not the points of difference and conflict, but the no less essential bonds which linked it with the life and thought of contemporary paganism.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ketcherside, 32.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Shulam and Hilary Le Cornu, *The Jewish Roots of Galatians*. Jerusalem: Academon, 2005. 140,141.

<sup>61</sup> Shulam, 144.

<sup>62</sup> Halliday, 2.

This concept is understood today as modern-day missiologists—the scholars who help evangelists and missionaries in their work of obeying the Great Commission—began to work into the problem of people being removed from their culture in order to become Christians, they developed the concept of contextualization. The word simply means *presenting the Gospel within the context of the recipient's culture, rather than outside it*. One could even say it's just a fancy way of talking about what Paul did naturally. When the Gospel is contextualized, new Christians remain within their culture and try to conform it as well as themselves to God's will.<sup>63</sup> This concept of contextualization means that if we understand the importance of it today when we present the Gospel message to cultures that are foreign to our way of thinking how important was it to understand as Paul the apostle taught the Gentiles? The original "Jewish" form of the Gospel message was contextualized for Gentiles—this was Paul's greatest contribution to evangelism and probably, still, his most misunderstood influence in holy writ.<sup>64</sup>

Richard Whatley, the great rhetorician of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wrote: "As one may bring himself to believe almost anything he is inclined to believe, it makes all the difference whether we begin or end with the inquiry, 'What is truth?'"<sup>65</sup> As one searches for truth in the courtroom with the assumption of innocence and the burden of proof so one has to search for truth in the words of God. But searching for truth is a loaded question isn't it? However absolute the truth of Christianity may be in itself, the expression of it, at any given time, must surely, in the nature of things, be but relative and partial. It must continually be undergoing reinterpretation at the hands of its human adherents. *No single interpretation doubtless can be the whole truth, for each, in turn, is equally conditioned by human imperfection.* It is obviously impossible to understand the Christian thought of any particular period without reference to the intellectual and social environment of the thinkers. For from that bondage not the greatest of human kind can escape. Not one of us can think away, I doubt indeed if he can justly analyze, the various influences of his education, his social surroundings, the thoughts, the amusement or the scientific opinions of the society to which he belongs.<sup>66</sup> For these reasons we need to proceed with diligence, thoroughness, caution, and rigor if we wish to glean from the Biblical text the message its authors sought to convey; otherwise, we risk imposing our views on it instead of discerning its claims on us.

## **Hungering and thirsting for the knowledge of God**

In his classic "White Fang" Jack London, in describing the young pup, talks about the insatiable desire that it felt in its very being to kill meat and battle it. "He was justifying his existence that which life can do no greater; for life achieves its summit when it does to the uttermost that which it was equipped to do."<sup>67</sup> Man was created to be in union with his Creator. We were created to walk and talk with God – it is here that

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<sup>63</sup> David H. Stern, *Restoring the Jewishness of the Gospel*. Clarksville, Maryland: Lederer Books, 2009. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Stern, 9.

<sup>65</sup> [www.publicspeakingproject.org](http://www.publicspeakingproject.org), 2-9.

<sup>66</sup> Halliday, 2, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Jack London, *The Call of the Wild and White Fang*. New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2003. 150.

Adam and Eve found their summit, their mountaintop experience, their glimpse into the Promised Land. When they walked and talked with God life was no better and there was no better place to be. Unfortunately it was short lived – or was it? Has Paradise been lost to us forever? Once man was driven out of it, and a flaming sword placed at the entrance, we seem to believe that never again were man and God able to talk together and discuss items of eternal significance. Then God gave revelation, law, son – a glimpse into the redemptive mind of God in flesh—and it was once again regained. The Jews studied the scriptures with unwavering dedication. No commandment is more vital in Jewish life than the commandment to study Torah; it is the duty of every Jew—knowledge of Torah has never been the sole possession of priest, or rabbi or of any special group. Secondly, in Judaism, practice, not mere belief, is stressed. Hence a requirement is placed on every individual Jew to know what is expected of him, to know, through study, what should be done and what should not be done. Study of Torah is socially committed learning; its aim is a better society, a better world. To study Torah is a form of worship; “study is worship” is a unique Jewish teaching. Parts of the Bible, and of the Talmud, are incorporated into the regular prayers; public ceremonial readings of the Pentateuch and the Prophets form a central feature of every Sabbath and holiday worship and even of certain week-day services. In accordance with the injunction, “you shall meditate on it day and night” (Joshua 1:8), study of the Torah is not limited to childhood of youth; it is a lifetime duty.

In the Biblical period, religious education was the responsibility of the parents, who were assisted by the priests. When the synagogue was established, study and instruction were its main activities, and with the introduction of the public reading of the Pentateuch into the synagogue service, study of Torah became a regular part of Jewish worship. The reading of the Bible during the synagogue service had a very significant effect on schooling and education of the child. Since any worshipper could be called to read from the Torah scroll, which is without vowel points and punctuation, there was now an additional reason for every Jew to be able to read and understand the Hebrew Bible. Love for learning, a passionate search for knowledge, has always characterized the Jew. “It may fairly be claimed,” writes A.R.S. Kennedy, “that the Hebrews were facile princeps [they stood out above all others] among the nations of antiquity...in the importance which they attached to the education of the young.” This “indomitable eagerness of the Jewish people for education and the unconquerable thirst for knowledge which characterizes them” has its basis in the commandment to study Torah.<sup>68</sup>

Success in Torah understanding and the accumulation of Torah knowledge requires constant review and continuous application—even if a difficult concept must be analyzed a thousand times. But the root of success is not supernatural—it is within the grasp of anyone who expends the proper effort. But how is an average human being to fathom the wisdom of the Torah which is as deep as the sea?

*“This commandment is neither beyond your understanding nor is it far away. It is not in the heaven...nor is it beyond the sea...but the word is very near to you: in your mouth and in your heart to perform it (Deut. 30:11).*

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<sup>68</sup> Rabbi Henry A. Cohen, *A Basic Jewish Encyclopedia*. Hartford, Conn.: Hartmore House, 1965.

To explain this verse the Midrash describes an ignoramus who entered the synagogue. Seeing people studying Torah, he wondered aloud and asked: “How can I learn all of this?”

Those who heard his remark responded, “Being with Aleph-Beis, (the first two letters in the Hebrew alphabet), proceed to Scripture, then go on to Mishnah and Gemara.” (commentaries)

Upon hearing this he thought to himself, “How can I learn so much?” and left.

The Midrash (commentary) then offers the parable of a jewel suspended high above the ground. A fool despaired of getting to it, but a clever person brought a ladder, climbed up rung by rung, and finally reached the jewel. Similarly, a fool wonders, “How can I possibly learn all of the Torah?” But what does a clever person do? He taken one step at a time, learning a chapter every day until he has mastered all of the Torah. (Devarim Rabbah 30:11).

As God commanded Joshua (1:8), “You should contemplate it day and night,” so too does He command us to devote time to Torah study every day and every night. As the hours of learning accumulate, stores of knowledge are accumulated.<sup>69</sup>

Talmud Torah is the foundation of all other commandments, for it is by studying the Torah that the Jew learns the way of life that God requires of him. Furthermore, it is upon this study that the preservation, and the survival, of the Jewish people and Jewish teachings depend.<sup>70</sup>

The canon of the Hebrew Scriptures, and those epistles that we now call the New Testament, were carefully guarded, prayed over, and compiled with the serious contemplation that this was the word of God for man for all time.

Consider this: *if this is the **word of God** then how important is it for us to STUDY it with the utmost seriousness, taking all views into consideration, debating with fervor, yet love, and always searching, always seeking for that nugget that we may have missed and that others have found. Is it possible that there are still treasures to be discovered? Is it possible that God still wants to talk to us, lead us, guide us, help us find in this life heaven, paradise, meaning?* If so, how is this done?

The theme of this course is not how to *read* the Bible but how to *study* the Bible. Reading is something that you can do in a leisurely way, something that can be done strictly for entertainment in a casual, cavalier manner. But study suggests labor, serious and diligent work.<sup>71</sup>

We fail in our duty to study God’s word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not because it is dull and boring, but because *it is work*. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion; our problem is that we are lazy.<sup>72</sup> While just about every believer, and quite a few non-believers, has an opinion to offer about the Bible, and concepts, doctrines, and teachings found therein, very few have really studied it to see if their opinions make any sense.

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<sup>69</sup> Michael L. Munk, *The Wisdom in the Hebrew Alphabet*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Mesorah Publications, 1986. 50-51

<sup>70</sup> Rabbi Henry A Cohen, *A Basic Jewish Encyclopedia*. Hartford, Conn.: Hartmore House, 1965. 29-31

<sup>71</sup> J. I. Packer, *Why Study the Bible?* Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press. 170.

<sup>72</sup> Packer, 17.

God, in passages like Deuteronomy 6:6-9, sovereignly commands that his Word be taught so diligently that it penetrates the heart. The content of that Word is not to be mentioned causally and infrequently; repeated discussion is the order of the day, every day. As a stepping-stone to wisdom, knowledge is important to constantly seek after. Knowledge is limitless and powerful, but, in the end, useless without understanding. Unfortunately, understanding is not something that can be taught; it must be learned through personal experiences.<sup>73</sup> The call to bind on the hand, the forehead, the doorpost and gate makes it clear that God is saying that the job must be done by whatever method it takes. Why? This is the only task that helps us gain an eternal perspective – it speaks to us with absolute and final authority. The advantage of the equipment provided by Scripture is that knowledge is made available to us that can be learned from no other source. Here the mind of God is laid bare on all matters of eternal significance. With knowledge of Scripture we do not have to rely on secondhand information, or bare speculation, to learn who God is and what he values. In the Bible he reveals himself; his word must be absorbed into our heart and soul; yet, it's an unfortunate truth that this often doesn't happen.

There are very few things in Bible study that have a profound impact on our understanding of God's message as the hermeneutics (the study of interpretation) we work by. Women preaching in the Sunday morning assembly will be either looked upon as good, bad, or indifferent depending on your hermeneutic. A kitchen in the church building, how the youth program is run, whether you use instrumental music, speaking in tongues, a separate priesthood, the use of the church facilities, etc. will appear in or out of line with God's will depending on your set of hermeneutical rules. It is not the intent of this course of study to get all students to line up with a certain hermeneutic so that we can agree on all points of doctrine (as if such were even possible without severe arm twisting and manipulation). It is rather the intent of this course of study to get students of God's word to open up their minds to the possibilities of scholarship, allow room for disagreement and choice and, putting the word of God into their minds, allowing his spirit to lead them in whatever path he desires for them to take.<sup>74</sup>

As those who follow God and his son, we are commanded to attain knowledge, but more to acquire wisdom. Knowledge is necessary if wisdom is to be gained, but it is not identical with wisdom. One can have knowledge without having wisdom, but one cannot have wisdom without having knowledge. A person without knowledge is ignorant. A person without wisdom is deemed a fool.<sup>75</sup> (Ps. 14, 54 – “the fool has said in his heart there is no God...”) Such a God-denying fool is associated with those “busy with evil” and social insensitivity. If one's theology is faulty, one's spiritual and social consciousness is blunted.<sup>76</sup>

In the Western world knowledge has often been limited in definition, confined to abstract concepts of theoretical principles. In Hebrew thought to “know” something was to experience it, rather than merely to intellectualize it. To “know” someone was to share an intimate personal relationship with that person. It was for this reason that Rabbis had disciples that followed them. When Jesus ushered his invitation, “Follow me” it was a

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<sup>73</sup> Kelsey Blosser, *To Each His Own*. Oaks Christian English Class: Oaks Christian, 2012. 7.

<sup>74</sup> Packer, 20.

<sup>75</sup> Packer, 21.

<sup>76</sup> Marvin Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1989. 287.

summons to experience him and his teachings. How else would someone “learn of him that he was meek and gentle”? That’s not book learning—it’s experiencing him. This idea embraces the whole human personality. A grasp of so much information was not enough; it also implied a response in the practical domain of life, in behavior and morals.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, once you’re busy with studying the word respond to it in practical ways that display God and his presence with your life. If you don’t respond with a life that magnifies God then the Spirit that resides in the word is being squelched and you will be held accountable.

## **Education in Galilee**

Because of such misinformation concerning those living in and around Galilee in the first century many believe them to have been the lower rung of the education of the scriptures among Jewish circles. Many look at scriptures such as Acts 4:13 and state that these men were ignorant and simply led by the spirit for their knowledge.

**“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”**

Not only do such statements show that they aren’t allowing for any other possible interpretation to be introduced, but it shows a complete show of ignorance of first century Jewish methods of teaching. What we see here is nothing more than the green eyed monster of envy. If you’ll look at the context notice that it is the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. What’s the problem? Well, it’s not all of the people (only a very select group), and the priests probably refer to the Sadducean element, who is mentioned specifically later, who didn’t believe in the resurrection of the dead or spiritual beings or a life after death; the captain of the temple would also fall into this realm. You might remember that it was Jesus who attacked the money changers of the temple, along with those who sold animals:

**“And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.” (John 2:14-16)**

In attacking the financial base of the temple he attacked those in charge of the temple. Of course they would be upset with him and slander him, and his followers, in any way possible. Were their charges true? Absolutely not! Today we know that education in Galilee, in the first century, surpassed that in Judea in every way. How do

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<sup>77</sup> Wilson, 287, 288.

we know that? Because most of the famous Rabbis mentioned from the first century are from Galilee (Jesus included), and the ethical and moral quality of their teaching exceeded that of their Judean counterparts. Yes, there was a lot of animosity that those in Judea could have toward those in Galilee. In high school we called such serious students schoolies. If you didn't want to work as hard, and receive the educational rewards, why not attack the individuals who did. It is that that happened to the disciples of Jesus in the first century in this particular scripture. They knew the word of God; they had been trained in it, memorized it, and could now teach it. This was no accident or miraculous event that happened without their engaging their minds and hearts toward the one whom they saw sacrificed and risen from the grave. This is our spiritual legacy. It MUST BE REBORN!

### **What do the Scriptures say about knowledge and study?**

*It is important that students bring a certain ragamuffin, barefoot irreverence to their studies; they are not here to worship what is known, but to question it. ~Jacob Bronowski*

**Deuteronomy 6:6-9-** “And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets on your forehead. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

**Joshua 1:8-** “meditate in it (the scriptures) day and night.”

**Psalms 19:8-11-** “The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.” (NIV)

**Psalms 34:8-10-** “Taste, then, and see that the Lord is good. Happy the man who finds refuge in him! Fear the Lord, all you his holy people; for those who fear him lack nothing. Unbelievers suffer want and go hungry, but **those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.**” (NEB)

**Psalms 36:7b-8-** “And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of thy wings. They drink their fill of the abundance of Thy house; and Thou dost give them to drink of the rivers of Thy delights.” (NAS)

**Psalms 42:1,2-** “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God...” (NIV)

**Psalms 63:1,5-** “O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; **my soul thirsts for you,** my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” (NIV) “I am satisfied as with a rich and sumptuous feast and wake the echoes with thy praise.” (NEB)

**Psalms 81:10-** “I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.” (NIV)

**Psalms 107:9-** “He has satisfied the thirsty soul, and the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.” (NAS)

**Psalms 119:2,10,20-** “Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart...I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands...My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.” (NIV)

**Psalms 119:103-** “How sweet are your promises to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (NIV)

**Psalms 143:6-** “I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.” (NIV)

**Psalms 147:15, 18-** “He sends his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly...He sends his word and melts them; he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow.” (NIV)

**Proverbs 1:7; 9:10-** Wisdom begins with the “fear of the Lord”.

**Proverbs 2:1-5-** “My son, if you accept my words and store up my commandments within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.” (NIV)

**Proverbs 5:1-** “My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight.” (NIV)

**Isaiah 5:13-** “Therefore my people will go into exile for lack of understanding...” (NIV)

**Isaiah 40:8 –** “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.” (NIV)

**Isaiah 55:1-3a-** “Come, all who are thirsty, come, fetch water; come, you who have no food, buy corn and eat; come and buy, not for money, not for a price. Why spend money and get what is not bread, why give the price of your labor and go unsatisfied? Only listen to me and you will have good food to eat, and you will enjoy the fat of the land. Come to me and **listen to my words, hear me, and you shall have life.**” (NEB)

**Amos 8:11-13-** “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord God, “when I will send a famine on the land. Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather **for hearing the words of the Lord.** And people will stagger from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they will go to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they will not find it. In that day the beautiful virgins and the young men will faint from thirst.” (NIV)

**Hosea 4:6-** “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge...” (NIV)

**John 4:13, 14-** “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (NIV)

**John 7:37-** “On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.’”

**Acts 17:11-** “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” (NIV)

**2 Timothy 2:15-** “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” (NIV)



**1 Peter 2:2, 3-** “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” (NIV)

**1 Peter 3:15-** “But in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” (NIV)

**Revelation 21:6-** “...I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.” (NIV)

**Revelation 22:17-** “The spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.” (NIV)

### **Beware! The Sensitive Christian**

Huh? Yeah, I know it sounds a bit bizarre, but let me explain. This is the Christian who *lives by his feelings rather than through his understanding of the Word of God*. It's like the individual that instead of studying the scriptures expects a revelation to be given him by the Spirit of God. While the scriptures say that he'll guide us into all truth, it doesn't say that he'll give it to us. Guide and give are two different concepts. This individual cannot be moved to service, prayer, or study unless he “feels like it”. His Christian life is only as effective as the intensity of present feelings. When he experiences spiritual euphoria he is a whirlwind of Godly activity; when he is depressed, he is spiritual incompetent. He constantly seeks new and fresh spiritual experiences and uses them to determine the Word of God. His “inner feelings” become the ultimate test of truth.

This person doesn't need to study the scriptures because he knows the will of God by his feelings. He doesn't want to know God: he wants to experience him like a cup of cold water that's run down your back. The sensitive Christian equates “childlike faith” with ignorance. He thinks that when the Bible calls us to childlike faith it means a faith without content, a faith without understanding. He doesn't know that the Bible says, “In evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature” (1 Cor. 14:20). He doesn't realize that Paul tells us again and again, “My beloved brethren, I would not have you ignorant”. (Romans 11:25)

To believe what I believe simply because I believe it, or to argue that my opinion is true simply because it is my opinion, is the epitome of arrogance. *If my views cannot stand the test of objective analysis and verification, humility demands that I abandon them.*

This could be the fault of synods, schools, colleges, preachers, priests, lectureships, and overbearing, pompous, haughty brethren who believe more about their doctrine from what they “feel” to be the truth than any concern about the word that is living, active, and dividing both of the joints and marrow. (I believe the words here indicate a present – not past – context) So much skepticism, cynicism, and negative criticism have spewed forth from the intellectual world of theologians that many “laymen” have lost their trust in academia. In many cases there is the fear that faith will not hold up under rational scrutiny, so the defense becomes the denigration of the human

mind. We turn to feelings rather than to our minds, our acumen, our intellect to establish and preserve our faith.

Christianity is supremely intellectual. Scripture is addressed to the intellect, without, at the same time, solely embracing a spirit of intellectualism. The Christian life is not to be a life of bare conjecture or cold rationalism; it is to be a life of vibrant passions: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Strong feelings of joy, love and exaltation are called for again and again in both the scriptures and our daily lives. **But those passionate feelings are a response to what we understand with our minds, our intellect, to be true** – passions are too tricky by themselves to place our eternal destiny within their grasp. The issue of faith is not so much whether we believe in God, but whether we believe the God we believe in. Thus, our search begins!

**Let's define three terms that will be used throughout this study -- exact definitions will help keep any misunderstandings of exactly what we are talking about to a minimum.**

**Exegesis** - the attempt to view the Biblical text objectively by drawing the meaning out of a given text. This can only go so far as helping understand what the original message was to the original audience.

**Hermeneutic** – the study of interpretation which includes an interpretative framework. A hermeneutic can also be defined as a specific system or method for interpretation, or a specific theory of interpretation.

**Epistemology**- the study of knowing

## **Some Basic Conservative assumptions**

(To be sure that we have the groundwork to continue in our study let's make sure that these things are believed by all that enter into this study)

1. The Bible is absolute truth.
2. The Bible is an accurate historical record of the events which it describes.
3. The books of the Bible were divinely inspired by God's Holy Spirit.
4. The Bible reveals God's will for us today.
5. Human beings are capable of correctly understanding the Bible (meaning that we understand and comprehend what God expects out of each and every one of us as his crowning achievement) .

## **Do it yourself – Bible study skills**

“I would live to study, and not study to live.”

Bacon—Memorial of Access. From a Letter to King James I. See Birch’s ed. of Bacon—  
Letters, Speeches, etc. P. 321. (Ed. 1763).

(My thanks to my good friend, and mentor, Jim Massey from International Bible College for aiding me in understanding this material. A great deal of this is gleaned from his personal teaching to many young men and women over the years. This section is personally dedicated to him because of his love of the Lord, his patient endurance with many, and his desire to see the world brought to Christ. Jim does not rest in peace; he rests with the Prince of peace!)

### **I. This is a revolutionary way of doing what we have not been doing – not a better way of doing what we have been doing.**

A. This concept is only for those that want to change, grow, develop, and find out what Gods message is to them personally.

B. This is direct, not second hand, discovery

#### **1. This type of discovery is not through someone else.**

a. Breathing second-hand air will keep one alive, but such stagnant breath does not vitalize someone.

b. Direct Bible study is filling ones lungs with the uncontaminated oxygen straight from the mind of God to yours.

c. Once you breathe this fresh, invigorating, life changing way of connecting with God you’ll never want to go back to the way it was.

i. It’s like the baby eagle that’s grown to the point that it’s time to leave the nest. Once it does the idea of returning doesn’t enter his mind.

ii. When you breathe in the pure oxygen of God you can’t go back to the way it was.

iii. The comfortable nest, with its close confining walls and stagnant air, that you were a part of is no longer an option.

- c. Discovery is as invigorating and thrilling as it searches into the mind and heart of our Creator.
  - i. While a steady diet of hash can be tolerated, a steady diet of rehashed hash cannot excite us. While it may keep us alive, who wants to live while eating it over and over?
  - ii. Warmed over “spiritual meat” cannot whet the appetite like direct discovery of Biblical truths for oneself.
  - iii. No longer is repeating what others have said and studied part of an individuals study. Now we can know how to research the original culture, language, and context of the original audience and author. We’re now panning for the gold of Gods original message and then making application.

C. This is the difference between investigation and indoctrination

- 1. *Indoctrination* – repeating the accepted view
- 2. *Investigation* – searching to find the view that your research indicates is valid.
  - a. This is the difference between brain washing and brain stretching.
  - b. True: God led Bible study discovers and uncovers pure Biblical doctrine, while, by indoctrination, the person feeding merely feeds back the feeder pre-chewed and predigested food with the taste and nourishment largely gone.
  - c. “If not to hunger for the meaning of it all then tell me what a soul is for? Why have the wings unless you're meant to fly, and tell me please why have a mind if not to question why?”  
(Barbra Streisand, “Where is it Written?” *Yentel*, 1983)
- 3. This is doing your own homework and not cheating from someone else who’s already studied. You may bring the right answers, but you haven’t worked out the problems for yourself; therefore, it means very little.

## II. Are you a Bloodhound or a Copy Cat?

A. A copy cat imitates the work of others constantly while doing nothing of their own.



B. Bloodhound – sniffs the trail of until he finds the scent and then follows it

- 1. He only follows his own nose and not that of another.
- 2. Doesn’t care where any other dog goes – may go in the opposite direction from the pack.
  - a. The pack can run a cold trail.
  - b. An experienced dog knows the tricks of the trade.
- 3. He will find the right trail which cannot be found any other way.

C. Are you an explorer or a slave?

1. Discovery is a thrilling experience reserved only for those with the spirit of Christopher Columbus.
    - a. We know his name because he was a discoverer and took chances.
    - b. Discovering is the privileged thrill reserved only for discoverers.
  2. Every explorer had burden bearing slaves who did only what they were told and never discovered anything for themselves.
    - a. Do you know any of the names of the slaves that worked with him every day?
    - b. It's forbidden to those who are content to walk in the footsteps of others.
  3. Do you want to be a robot and be programmed, or discover and write your own understanding of the Bible?
- D. No one should be on spiritual welfare
1. Many social welfare cases could be making their own way, but it's easier to take a handout than finding and keeping a job.
    - a. The problem with welfare is that a handout destroys the spirit of achievement and ends with a state of mind and heart that not only expects handouts but desires such.
    - b. They cannot experience the thrill that a paycheck gives and only know the drudgery that a handout delivers.
    - c. The meager and slim joy of a welfare state of mind cannot be compared to the challenge and reward of the self made man.



you want to give them and will never have anything of their own.

- b. You know why you believe anything? Hopefully, you personally have studied and dug out the material for yourself. If not you don't know why you really believe anything except that someone told you to do so.
  - i. By doing your own study you gain confidence by building it.
  - ii. You can gain the confidence to do this for yourself and by yourself.
  - iii. If you are attracted by the hope of direct Bible investigation and rewarding personal discovery you have

already hit upon the most IMPORTANT DISCOVERY IN YOUR LIFE!

E. Choose your rut well

1. Years ago a sign, on an old country road, read, “*Choose your rut well. You’re going to be in it for the next 20 miles.*” That’s what happens when you get in a rut; you’re stuck and you can’t get out without great effort.
  - a. By sliding into an over dependence on “Bible aids” many have slipped into a rut that has stifled the true excitement found when someone discovers how to study the Bible for themselves.
  - b. Only when someone is deeply disappointed in a rut can they find the courage and energy to escape from them.
2. Acts 8 – A man, traveling back to Ethiopia from Jerusalem, is reading his Bible.
  - a. 8:31- “Can a man guide me?” Isn’t that what many say who depend on the preacher, teacher, parents, etc. to tell them what to believe?
    - i. So the question is: Can we understand the Bible without a guide?
    - ii. If the blind lead the blind do both still fall into the ditch?
  - b. In Acts 8 the Ethiopian Eunuch had Philip sent by the Holy Spirit to him, and he showed the eunuch Jesus using the scriptures he was confused by.
    - i. Since all people are susceptible to spiritual blindness who do you listen to? How do you know who is lead by the spirit and who isn’t?
    - ii. We should trust God to lead us, with a deep and abiding study of his word, to lead us into all truth. But in such trust the true guide now becomes God, our study of his word, and any unveiling that our own personal study of it reveals.

**Choose your Rut  
well! You’re going to  
be in it for the next  
20 miles.**

### III. Try to study the Bible better

- A. The purpose of this class is to aid you in developing the fundamental skills that will be sharpened throughout a lifetime of Bible study.
1. The bare basics of Bible study will be given you. The point is that this is deeply personal. No one can do this for you. This study must be between you and God before it can influence anyone else.
  2. If we depend on others to do our study is to lose our greatest heritage given to each of us by God – our minds.
- B. Throw away the crutches
1. Crutches are for crippled, but not for the healthy. If a healthy man tries to use them they hinder greatly his normal daily activity.
  2. The wrong study helps, the ones that don’t look at the text and deeply consider the implications of culture and history, hinder us greatly.
    - a. There is the story of a mother who had a boy that couldn’t swim so she didn’t let him go near water until he could swim.

- b. Did you know that probably the best way to learn to swim is just to jump in. (1 Pet. 2 – long (desire) the spiritual milk)
  - i. Rational milk is known by the rational mind.
  - ii. You understand the word of God by using YOUR mind.
- c. Spirituality is not driven into man: you can't force someone to study the Bible.
  - i. This type of study has to be longed for and will be when they see a need.
  - ii. This need is seen when a spiritual emptiness is recognized and acknowledged. The Bible calls it hungering and thirsting after righteousness.
  - iii. Hunger is the happy realization of our spiritual needs: we study and grow because we deeply want to.
  - iv. To study better you have to be appalled with the way that you haven't -- the way a baby isn't happy unless his/her belly is full.

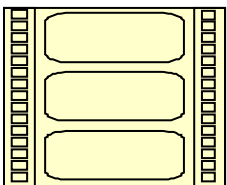
**Private interpretation gives license to interpret but not to distort.**

- C. Does this mean that I have the right to interpret Scriptures to suit myself?
  - 1. May a person interpret Scriptures in a whimsical, capricious manner with no restraint?
  - 2. Should the private individual take seriously the interpretations of others such as those who specialize in teaching the Scriptures?
  - 3. Private interpretation doesn't mean that individuals have the right to distort the Scriptures.
    - a. With the right of private interpretation comes the responsibility of accurate interpretation.
    - b. Private interpretation gives license to interpret but not to distort.

### **The four beginning steps in “Do-It-Yourself Bible Study Skills”**

**“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what [is] the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” (Eph. 3:18,19, KJV)**

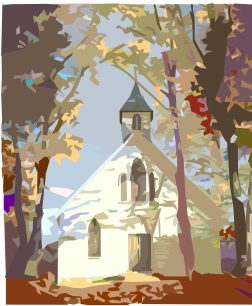
#### **1. Blank film**



- a. Put blank film in your mental camera. Unlearn anything you think you already know on any subject. Of course this can't be done in an absolute way since the human mind is the fountain head of all action. However, if you find that prior convictions impede your progress in any intellectual achievement try to see if your previous ideas are based on tradition, prejudice, etc. and not on a solid mindset dedicated to achieve Gods will in your life.
  - i. Love God with...all mind (Rom. 12:1,2)

- ii. Dedicate your mind and develop it for him – don't repeat views parents and leaders have told you without some investigation.
  - iii. The power of the message of God works through the mind by faith and not visions, feelings, or a still small voice in the night. (Col. 3:2; Heb. 8:10)
- b. Be strongly favored not to hold to any previous view.
- c. Resolve not to care what the truth turns out to be. (that is what your investigation turns up) Your relationship to God is individualistic. It's you, God, and his word.
- d. Do not consult anyone or any aid during this step.

## 2. Bounce



- a. Bounce your conclusions off anyone and everyone.
- b. Rehearse your conclusions to a close friend that loves and follows God. Make sure their trustworthy.
- c. Seek the input of your church, school class, and other acquaintances that have a spiritual impact upon your life.

## 3. Group input

- a. Anti-aircraft fire is good for you. It will allow you to know whether or not your conclusion is good or not.
- b. Personal conclusions must now be refined in the light of group input.
  - i. Orientation – Take new facts and orient with the scheme of redemption and the whole Bible.
  - ii. Distillation – Your mind needs to be a distillery. The aging process is slow to produce good alcohol. The same is true with distilling Biblical information.
- c. In view of your reflection and correction of yourself, and others, draw your final conclusion.
  - i. 1 Timothy 4:15 – Let's call this step *meditation*.
  - ii. Get all the facts and soak them in your mind. Make your mind like a washing machine and turn this material round and round.
- d. Enough time must be given to relate your conclusions to the entire Bible scheme. This is distilling and aging your initial views by filtering them through the whole Biblical theme; it is during this process that your concepts may begin to mature.
  - i. Filter personal research through the research of others.
  - ii. Filter conclusions through the absolute or possible test. Is it possible or absolutely certain that these conclusions are true? Is there no shadow of a doubt of its verifiability or application today?
  - iii. Filter through the hard rocks of the daily obedience test.
  - iv. This type of soaking and distilling filters away all but the purest truth. (Let each man be fully assured in his own mind)



e. Unaltered contemplation for weeks, months, or every years will make the cream finally come to the top. It is in this step that you learn the old adage to be true: “Patience is a virtue.”

#### 4. Application

- a. This is the practical result of your study – application! If you didn’t have to apply and obey it we could come up with some dreams, and highly impractical and “unscriptural” ideas.
  - i. This is the acid test of contemplation.
  - ii. ***Unless a view can be universally and practically applied it is false.***  
Bible truth is applicable. (Mk. 16:15, 16)
- b. Take care to rightly divine ‘absolute’ truth and ‘possible’ truth.
  - i. Absolute – can’t be wrong (one God).
  - ii. Possible – might or might not be (women wearing veils).



#### Discovering your personal Hermeneutic

Everyone has an interpretive framework and looks at scripture within this framework; however, we may not know what it is and how to consistently apply it. We often interpret the Bible the way three boys looking at a ball game through three different knotholes sees it. Each has his own unique perspective and depending on where you’re “coming from” will depend on your interpretative framework. Since we are separated from the events and happenings of the Bible by at least 2000 years, differences in culture and languages give us problems unless we transport ourselves backwards and try to see it their way. We need to be aware of such and see that each perspective has its strengths and limitations.

One’s personal hermeneutic is influenced by their presupposition concerning the role of scripture, and, since everyone has presuppositions, the real issue is the validity of it. We should not be ashamed to approach Scripture as the record of God’s revelation in history and make apology for the fact that God’s revelation gives meaning and direction for all time to each individual’s life. However, it’s important that we discover how we interpret the Bible in order to know its strengths and limitations.

Some conservative presuppositions about scripture are:

**The  
differences in  
culture,  
language,  
experiences,  
and  
assumptions**

1. *The true canon of Scripture has been established.*
2. *The text we have is reliable.*
3. *The text of the Bible can be adequately translated and understood to gain the basic message of salvation and redemption.*
4. *Anyone can understand the Word of God.*

Hermeneutics deals with the answers we give to some basic questions:

1. What is the Bible?
2. How do we tell what it means?
3. What does its silence mean?
4. What is important about the Bible?
5. How is the Bible's authority to be understood?
6. In what sense is the Bible God's word?
7. How can I tell custom from command?

We are separated from the events and happenings of the Bible by an enormous fence made of, at the least, 2000 years, and at the most pre-history. The differences in culture, language, experiences, and assumptions of all kinds mark the understanding of the text that we currently have. It is not a 20<sup>th</sup> century book and therefore we cannot lay upon any part of it *our* ideas, language, culture and assumptions though the scriptures can certainly be applied to us today. But how to apply it, and what parts can we apply, is the problem.

Consider the following list and see what you would apply as '**scriptural**' and what to apply as simply **opinion**. By **scriptural** this would be a test of fellowship with another believer. By **opinion** you could remain in fellowship with another believer though you disagreed with them. (While, in one way or another, all of the scriptures, or ideas, mentioned below are commands or examples in what sense are they "scriptural?" Separate those things that you consider essentially binding upon the "church" today and those that are not.)

If you were to minister this "test" it would be an analysis of your concept of restoration. For instance, as an evangelist one is obligated to separate his culture from the gospel and take to the lost simply and only the good news (gospel). He has no right to deculturalize his potential converts as he brings to them the gospel. They do not have to become Americans to become Christians, nor middle-class Southerners. In "restoration", we want to hold fast to those things that are "essential" or the "Universal" or the "gospel" and restore these, but allow freedom in matters of culture or nonessentials. You will be asked three questions to help you in this quest. It must be understood that these are not the only questions that bear on the subject, and the lists given are not complete as far as questions asked concerning religious culture and differences in faith between people. This is simply an effort to begin our conversation on what is essential (scriptural or gospel) and what is opinion (or nonessential).

**Question one:** (answer this question before you look at the other two)

***Which, of the following 25 items listed, are "cultural" and which are "gospel"? Or, to use previous terminology, which are 'scriptural' and which are 'opinion'?***

*By gospel I mean those commands or precedents that God wants all men in all ages and in all cultures to do or practice.* It may be in order to be saved, and it may also be after one is saved; but if God wants this done be sure to note such.

*By cultural I mean a practice used by the people of God, but not necessarily by command of God.* In some cultures it may have validity, but in others it may not. Or, perhaps under certain circumstances God will insist that it be done, but not insist upon it under other circumstances.

1. Greet one another with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16)
2. Don't eat meat that's been sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 6:1)
3. Be baptized (Acts 2:38)
4. Women ought to have a veil on her head (1 Cor. 11:10)
5. Homosexual lifestyle
6. It is indecent for a woman to speak in an assembly (1 Cor. 14:35)
7. Christmas and Easter celebration (not to mention Halloween)
8. Abstain from (eating) blood (Acts 15:29)
9. Observing festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths (Col. 2:16)
10. The first day of the week beginning on Saturday night (Acts 20:7)
11. Anointing with oil (James)
12. I permit no woman to teach men (1 Tim. 2:12)
13. No braided hair, gold, or pearls (1 Tim. 2:9)
14. Abstaining from drinking wine (1 Tim. 3:8), or drinking wine with a meal
15. Circumcision
16. Preachers sewing tents for a living (Paul)
17. Drinking blood
18. Speaking in tongues
19. Singing without musical instruments in church (Col. 3:16)
20. Taking collections in church (1 Cor. 16:1)
21. Having missionary or benevolent societies (1 Cor. 16:1-4)
22. Meeting in homes for church (Rom. 16:23)
23. Wives be subject to your husbands (Col. 3:18)
24. Circumcision
25. Urge younger widows to remarry (1 Tim. 5:11-14)

**Question two: *What principle did you use to separate these?***

Since you did a separation it is obvious that you had some standard. Was it common sense, cultural problems, prejudice, sociological implications, or something else? Your principle must be double edged; that is, it must include all and only what you included; and it must exclude all and everyone that you excluded! It sometimes happens that a man will verbalize one principle but actually be operating in another. (If you have a different principle for each example you are operating in sheer lawlessness, and you might be selecting simply on the basis of prejudice.)

- Swap papers and allow another student to examine your list and see if the principle that you wrote at the top works with the list that you have created. If you see any problems please write your conclusions at the bottom of the page.

**Question three: Which of these items in your list is so important that you would separate from a church and form a new one if they would not come to your point of view?** Or, which are so essential that you would initiate action to split a church if, after a fair effort at getting them to accept the “truth”, you felt you could not remain in fellowship with them? And, on the other side of the coin, **which of these would you hold to be valid, but you would tolerate error for the sake of fellowship and unity, even though you prefer to do things the other way?** What things would you say are indispensable in planting a church in a cultural setting different to your own?

**We  
always  
see in  
part,  
through  
a mirror**

- Do you begin to see the problem with Biblical interpretation today and the sticky situations that can be created from those that have different views of how you interpret scripture?
- Once you started separating them into categories the big question running through your mind was, “By what measure do I separate those items that are essential and binding today from those that are not?” Congratulations! You have just begun to discover your personal hermeneutic. What was the principle that helped determine the difficult question of fellowship? I ask this because sometimes a person will think they are operating upon one principle when actually they are operating upon another!

The real problem of Hermeneutics is rooted in a philosophical reality called epistemology (the study of knowing).

I know something only if:

1. It is true.
2. I believe it.
3. My belief is based on correct information.

Suppose a small child says that she knows it will rain a week from now because last night she saw a shooting star, and Chuck, her next door neighbor, says that it always rains one week after you see a shooting star. Even if it does rain, she did not know but guessed accidentally. Though her guess was based in something she ‘believed’ was true, it didn’t make it true. *The true belief concerning why it rained should be based on evidence based on good information and investigation.*

Our problem in knowing anything is always rooted in three items.

1. We always see in part, through a mirror darkly. We’re looking through a knot hole, it’s raining, and our glasses are smudged.
2. We all bring limits of our hermeneutic to gathering information and our sources are never perfect.
3. Humanly speaking we can never be 100% certain of our information, or our way of interpreting such information.

Therefore, no matter what our hermeneutic is, or how well we use the one we have, **we could be wrong!** This is the great problem that our hermeneutic knotholes raise, but it should not be disconcerting. We can know something only if someone who knows everything, who is so powerful that nothing can thwart him, who is always truthful, and who loves us, promises to lead us to believe the truth that we need to know. Since the spirit of God is promised to all that believe in God, and the spirit will guide us into all truth, then this is possible. However, we need to be aware that we still need a healthy humble attitude when it comes to our knowledge of truth, and to recall us to our need to constantly seek God and his guidance in our quest.



\*In view of this discussion one thing is clear: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.” (Deut. 29:29) There are some things the Lord has not revealed to us which will remain hidden until the end of time. I don’t know what those secret things are because they are SECRET! It is with these items that we often waste our time with discussing and pondering. One thing that is sure: we are not to add or subtract from God’s word (Deut 4:2; Prov. 30:6; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 9,10; Rev. 22:18,19). This simple warning tells us that when working with our personal hermeneutic we are not given the liberty to add or subtract from God’s word. This has to do with taking away, or neglecting, a practice, a concept, a means of salvation that God stated within his word, or adding a law or prohibition to his words which he did not give to us.

### **Some ideas that we need to be reminded of!**

1. *We do not have to be right all of the time because we aren't. We are all in error to some degree. If we test our beliefs we will find out that a lot of what we believe is incorrect. (To say that I cannot accept brethren in error is to deny the fact that no one is infallible. No one knows it all. If brethren accept you they will have to do it in spite of your error. You do not accept the error because you accept the brother, any more than you have to become cross-eyed because a brother in your physical family has such a defect.) The only one with a perfect understanding was Jesus and his father. We are all brothers and sisters not because we share the same opinions or interpretations but because we share the same Father.*
2. *It is fine to disagree -- not to break fellowship. No man is wrong when he speaks out against that which he cannot condone in the family, but that man sins who destroys the family ties over matters of indifference. (of course the question here is, "What is a matter of indifference or opinion?")*
3. *To have our personal views challenged and tested is a valuable asset to your spiritual life and possibly your greatest asset. Being different is a great asset. Think of how boring it would be if we were all exactly alike. All of the things that are not truth can be washed away if we work together and test!*
4. *Ideas and concepts have to be given time to be tested or investigated. The way we arrive at truth is by testing! This can be the most valuable asset to your spiritual life. Many of us would rather attack those that disagree with us rather than test and investigate our own beliefs. Just because someone doesn't agree with what I believe doesn't mean that their wrong.*
5. *As long as our mind is closed, believing that there is no way that I could be wrong, we live in bondage. Prejudice and error stem not so much from conviction as from our own experience.*
6. *If you're honest you will find your study testing everything that you believe all of the time. We can all agree that we are all in error to some degree. Otherwise we would have perfect knowledge of the scripture and be able to perfectly apply it in all situations.*
7. *For everything that you believe there are at least 20 (or more) different opinions from yours. They all need to be listened to and considered carefully. (none of them may be correct)*
8. *I need to find a reliable testing method to take a scripture and look at it to determine the truthfulness of what I think it says.*

### **Studying a book of the Bible**

If you'll follow these simple steps you can take the shortest, or longest, book in the Bible and slowly began to assimilate the material. This is only a first step but an essential one in determining the meaning of the text.

1. ***Read through the book and theme it.***

- a. Look for key words or key concepts. (in 1 Cor. 1-4 key words are wisdom, mystery, understanding, discernment. Gods wisdom vs. Mans wisdom)
  - b. Learn the problems in this book. Learn this by the answers to the problems that are given by the author to the original Corinthian audience. Can we learn the plan of attack by the plan of defense?
- 2. *Old Testament back grounding – in the New Testament many references from the Old Testament are used.***
- a. Why was the statement made in the Old Testament?
  - b. Usually the same reason it is stated in the Old Testament is the reason why it's used in the New Testament
  - c. Get the setting of all of the Old Testament references – may be an allusion, quotation, metaphor, or a word or two.
  - d. What did these people know from this Old Testament passage?
- 3. *Paraphrasing – the most important skill!***
- a. Divides the material you're studying into the context.
  - b. This is the way people think. It is a logical break that shows the message as it was written.
    - i. Don't say, "This verse means" but "This paragraph means".
    - ii. A verse will not say anything that the paragraphs it is in will not say.
    - iii. Any verse can be lifted out of its context and made to say what, in it's original context, it doesn't mean.
  - c. How do you paragraph?
    - i. Have to have a Bible; have to be able to read, and have to say, "I can."
    - ii. Begin looking for paragraphs – look for a segment to begin and end it like you would on an earthworm.
    - iii. Mark, with a pencil, where it begins and ends.
    - iv. Now, try to name it! Give it a long conclusive name that includes all. Then break it down into banners. Small easily manageable units of 2 to 3 words.
    - v. Take a green pen and circle the paragraph and write your banner in red either beside or above your encircled paragraph.

## **What Hermeneutic is used today?**

The following are three hermeneutics that have been taught, followed and sworn to by different schools of religious thought for years. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of each?

### **1. *Command, Approved Example, Necessary Inference***

- a. How do you interpret Silence?
- b. How do you decide what is a 'necessary inference'?
- c. What exactly is an approved command?
- d. What is an example for the first century and which are binding eternally?

### **2. *Pragmatic use of Logic***

- a. Genesis 6:13-14 is used by some to argue that instrumental music in the assembly is wrong.
- b. Noah is approached by God to build an ark to save the few righteous people and specimens of all the animals. A command is given to Noah: “Mark yourself an ark of cypress (‘gopher’ in older translations) wood.” There is a very simple command here – build an ark of cypress/gopher wood. Noah could either obey or disobey this command. If he had built the ark out of birch he would have disobeyed the command and been guilty of sin. If he had built half of it of birch, and half of it of cypress/gopher wood, he would have disobeyed God because the command was to build it out of cypress/gopher wood.
- c. The argument is made that if adding to what God has specifically commanded is sin, so, then, is adding musical instruments such as a piano or organ adding something to what God says about Christian assemblies. (Eph. 5:19- “Speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.”)
- d. The problem with this logic is that in Noah’s case he either obeyed God when he built the ark or he didn’t. If he built the ark out of birch, he was disobedient; not because he did something that Lord didn’t tell him to do, but because he didn’t do something that Lord did tell him to do.
- e. In the case of instrumental music there is no violation of any command. Adding the instrument does not prohibit singing, preaching, giving, communion, or anything else that we understand to be part of our corporate worship unto God.

### 3. *Custom, Original Language, Context*

- a. Look at the original customs of the first century believers and the cities and cultures that were a part of their daily lives.
  - i. Unless we have been exposed to a significantly different culture, we usually will assume that our own ways of doing things are correct.
  - ii. It is important that we do not make our way of doing things a part of the gospel itself. (Gal. 1:14-21) Such things as clothing, order of the services, visiting home un-announced and cleanliness, as important as it may seem, is not an essential part of the gospel message.
  - iii. It is important that we discern the difference between culture and faith, and change in cultural areas to serve people and their needs. (1 Cor. 9:20-22) Missionaries in modern day setting certainly understand this concept and the need to discern American customs from the cultural understanding of the culture in which they will be working.
  - iv. Failure to recognize the cultural element in the Biblical text leads to misapplication of the word. (Ex. 23:19)
    - \*Footwashing was taught by Anabaptists as one of the seven ordinances of the “true church”.
    - \*The Hutterites embraced communism because the Jerusalem church had all things in common.
- b. The original language being Hebrew (primarily) and Greek.
- c. Looking at the context that each scripture is couched in.



4. Identify the issue and practice, determine the strength and consistency of biblical teaching on the issue and practice, and list the cultural options open to the writer.

**Two aspects of interpretation that needs to be developed with proper balance are:**

1. Seeking the objective historical nature of the text. This is called **exegesis**. The true purpose of exegesis is to establish checks and balances against excessive subjectivism.
  - a. This must involve a view of the Bible as the inspired Word of God.  
(though it is not the nature of this course be aware that the concept of the word inspired has many thoughts and ideas associated with it)
  - b. Realize that there can be no meaning for a text other than the meaning intended by the writer for the original audience. These are letters to either groups of people or individuals. They may not have been aware that these would be grouped together to make up the New Testament. It is possible that the writers of the Old Testament (Moses, prophets, etc.) were aware of such a possibility.
  - c. Only then can the human element of scripture be properly discerned by paying attention to both a and b.
    - i. Seeking the application in the text for the contemporary situation of the interpreter is called **hermeneutics**. Contained in this exercise is the task of relating the historical meaning of the text to our own contemporary context. This is to be done as much as is possible without injecting one's own subjective ideas. (Ex.- This is the way we have always done it...)
    - ii. To properly interpret the scriptures one must avoid the extremes and be challenged by both the historical text and its contemporary significance realizing that the historical context provides the basis for its application.
    - iii. No meaning may be imported into the text that is extraneous to the text.
2. How to use the grammatico-historical method of exegesis is crucial to our study.
  - a. The task of exegesis begins with a careful, critical examination of the text in its historical context, paying attention to the political, cultural, religious, and philosophical surroundings.
    - i. In seeking an objective understanding of Scriptures, we do not thereby reduce Scripture to something cold, abstract and lifeless.
    - ii. What we are doing is seeking to understand what the word says in its context before we go about the equally necessary task of applying it to ourselves.
  - b. In order to understand the significance of biblical events and teaching, we must first distinguish transitory customs from eternal principles. (Acts 15:19-21)
  - c. Another dimension of this historical investigation must always include an analysis of the text's language, considering the grammatical, syntactical, and lexical material of the text.

## The Law of Language

The majority of this article is from Jim Myers  
(From: Through Their Eyes - June 1987)

***An inherent consequence of our distance from the world of Jesus is that we primarily understand Jesus' words as they apply within our twenty-first century eschatological and theological framework; however, Jesus' teachings reflect his cultural background as a Jewish rabbi in first-century Galilee.***

Interpreting scripture is the most problem-oriented area of the religious world. Many people claim many things about the Bible, often contradicting themselves, each others, and common sense. Today the problem is compounded with media and mass communications. Who can you trust? How do you evaluate these ideas fairly, to determine what is right?

In this article we present the method of Biblical analysis based on the Law of Language. With it you can judge anyone's views on scripture and get accurate interpretation when you study the Bible. Words, how words change, how people use words to communicate, and the meanings underlying words are all vitally important keys to clearly understanding what the authors of the Bible are talking about.

### Words

A word is like a secret code – it is of no value unless that code can be associated with something that has meaning. Each person has an inventory of mental images which are linked to specific codes called words. For example, a child observes a color and then learns to call the color 'red'. From that time on the child uses the word 'red' every time he sees that color. This is the way we build our vocabulary. Since people acquire words through individual learning experiences, each person possess various shades of meaning for a particular word or group of words.

People tend to use words which apply to their daily lives. An example of this is found in the following verses:

*Matthew 19:24* reads, "And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

*Mark 10:25* reads, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

*Luke 18:25* reads, "For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

In English the words 'needle' appears in all three verses. But the same three verses read in the Greek (Nestle-Aland) Bible show something different. Matthew and Mark have the word "RHAPHIS" for needle, but Luke has a totally different word, "BELONA." There is a difference between the words "RHAPHIS" is the Greek word for a common sewing needle. Luke uses the Greek word "BELONA," which

**A word is like a secret code – it is of no value unless that code can be associated with something**

is the word for a surgeon's needle. Since Luke was a doctor, he used the word that described the type of needle that was common to his everyday life. However, in English the word needle in Matthew and Luke look exactly the same. How would a reader of an English translation ever be able to know there was a difference? He would not.

## Can one word make a difference?

The total number of words in a certain book or language is not our primary concern. The most important factor is: on how many words do the author and the reader share the same meanings? If the author and the reader do not share the same meaning on even a single word, the results can be devastating. Here are two examples where the author and the reader did not reach a common agreement on just one word, resulting in the loss of millions of dollars and in one case thousands of lives.

### Corn

The word "corn" has three possible meanings. To the British corn means wheat, but to the Scots corn means oats, while to the American corn means maize. Not knowing this fact, an American government agency during the war bought "for" for European famine relief at the request of the British government. The British ordered wheat, but the Americans shipped maize. This bit of linguistic ignorance cost a few million dollars to repair.

**Historical perspective, knowledge of changes of forms through time and conditions under which changes occur**

### Mokusatsu

A Japanese word, mokusatsu, may have changed all our lives. It has two meanings: (1) to ignore, (2) to refrain from comment. The release of a press statement using the second meaning in July 1945 might have ended the war then. The Emperor was ready to end it, and has the power to do so. The cabinet was preparing to accede to the Potsdam ultimatum of the Allied – surrender or be crushed – but wanted a little more time to discuss the terms. A press release was prepared announcing a policy of mokusatsu, with the no comment implications. But it got on the foreign wires with the ignore implication through a mix-up in translation: "The cabinet ignores the demand to surrender." To recall the release would have entailed an unthinkable loss of face. Has the intended meaning been publicized, the cabinet might have backed up the Emperor's decision to surrender. In which event, there might have been no atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, no Russian armies in Manchuria, no Korean war to follow. The lives of tens of thousands of Japanese and American boys might have been saved. Only one word was misinterpreted. The Japanese sent the message "We refrain from comment" but the Allies received the message, "We choose to ignore". As you can see the definition of one word can be very important. (This article appeared in the March 1953 issue of Harper's Magazine and was written by W.J. Coughlin. Reprinted from Power of Words by Stuart Chase, page 4)

Here is an example from the Bible in which our previous discussion on corn will be very helpful. Matthew 12:1 (KJV) says, “At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were a hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.” Remember the King James Version is a product of the British culture, and the British name for “wheat” is “corn.” The maize that we call “corn” was unknown until the discovery of America. In modern translations we see the term “grain fields” correctly substituted for “corn fields”.

## Language is constantly changing

We have all heard the statement “the only sure thing is change.” Human beings seem to be in a constant process of change, and their language changes with them. Language is modified to meet the particular needs of people and society. In most cases we are not aware of these changes because they happen so slowly and gradually that they are imperceptible. Anyone who has lived sixty years or more is not using exactly the same grammar and pronunciation that he learned as a child. Even more dramatic than this is that many of the words in use today have totally different meanings than they did 50,60,or 80years ago. Let’s look at a few examples:

- (1) **Gay** – Thirty-five or forty years ago this word carried the meaning of ‘joyful, happy, enthusiastic’ but now it is almost exclusively associated with the term ‘homosexual.’
- (2) **Jet** – If we look up this word in any dictionary published before 1900 we will find “a solid, dry, black, inflammable fossil substance” or “a spout, spouting, or shooting of water”. The one thing you will not find is “an airplane.”
- (3) **Fellowship** – In 1611 when the King James Version of the Bible was written this term meant something very different from our modern meaning of being involved in a common activity. The Old English word is ‘feolaga’ which is borrowed from Scandinavian ‘felog.’ Felog is made up of ‘fe’ (cattle or money) and ‘-log’ (a person who lays something down). In 1611, fellowship would convey the idea of “to lay down money for a common cause of undertaking,” or “to pool your resources.” In Acts 2:42 we see the word ‘fellowship,’ and in Acts 2:44,45 fellowship is defined as “and all that believed were together, and had all things in common and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.” In today’s language fellowship means ‘companionship.’

Here are further examples of how words have changed over the years. The word is listed first, then its original English meaning.

- (1) Infant – nonspeaking
- (2) Foyer – fireplace
- (3) Meat – food of any kind
- (4) Naughty – poor (One who has naught)
- (5) Nice – stupid
- (6) Constable – stable companion
- (7) Holiday – holy day
- (8) Magazine – storehouse
- (9) Fool – tongue-wagger
- (10) Steward – keeper of the pigs

**Language is  
modified to  
meet the  
particular needs**

- (11) Senate – a group of old men
- (12) Alimony – eating money
- (13) Gossip – God’s relation
- (14) Lewd – a layman
- (15) Port – to amuse oneself
- (16) Fender – to beat off
- (17) Cobalt – a devil
- (18) Budget – a little boy
- (19) Broker – the one who opened the cask of wine

It is easy to see that these words have changed considerably. The original meanings are no longer used, and only with the help of special books on the history of words can we trace their etymology to their earlier form. The words listed above have changed over the past few hundred years, but they are still very common words in use today. We must be keenly aware of the danger when we encounter “everyday” words or words that we think we know their meaning.

To accurately understand the Bible you must go back to the original languages: Hebrew and Greek. This is not as difficult as it may sound, however -- all you need to start out with is knowing the alphabet. If you know the alphabets you can: (1) read an interlinear Bible; and (b) use the Hebrew and Greek lexicons (dictionaries). Using these tools will lead you to many insights, such as the fifth commandment reading “Thou shalt not murder” instead of “Thou shalt not kill.”

Vocabulary is the most loosely organized of the systems of language and is the one most open to change. It is relatively easy to add a new word – there are three requirements:

- (1) A need
- (2) An inventive person
- (3) A group of speakers to pick up the new word and use it.

The sources of new vocabulary items are many and varied and many change in popularity from one period to another or from one language to another. Commonly the new words are not new at all in form, but are simply new uses of established words. Once a new word is established, a whole family of new words can be made out of it by the process of “derivation”, the adding on of prefixes and suffixes primarily to change the grammatical function of the word. Just as new words keep coming into the language, so old ones keep going out of use and eventually out of memory, the usual reason being the things they refer to are no longer talked about. Sometimes an old word will be replaced by a new one for no apparent reason, as in the case of the Old English word ‘eme’ being replaced by its’ French synonym ‘uncle’. These processes are natural ones common to all languages. As the great lexicographer Samuel Johnson said in answer to Swift’s wish that words should be prevented from being obsolete,

***“But what makes a word obsolete more than general agreement to forbear it? And how shall it be continued when it conveys an offensive idea or recalled again into the mouths of mankind when it has once by disuse become unfamiliar, and by unfamiliar unpleasing.”*** (From preface to “A Dictionary of the English Language”, 1755)

Imagine the problems involved when working with the words of the Bible, written from 3250 years ago to 2000 years ago. Then consider the length of time involved as a

problem in itself; in addition, add to that the transmission of the words form one culture to another and translation becomes a monumental task to achieve a successful communication experience.

Simply being aware that words change helps us not to take for granted the accepted meanings of words or phrases. We must make sure we are using the original meaning and not another meaning which has become the accepted meaning today.

## The Communication Experience

A simple communication experience involves only two people. First, the **signifier (Ethos)** is the person speaking or the author of something written. He is the one sending a signal. The second person is the **signified, (Pathos)** the one listening or reading a written message. The signified is the one receiving the signal. The goal of a communication experience is for the signifier to transfer the information that he possesses to the signified. **(Logos)** If the signified understands the information transferred by the signifier exactly as the signifier understood it, we have a **successful communication experience**; but if the signified does not understand the information exactly as the signifier understood it, as **unsuccessful communication experience** has taken place. A successful communication experience results only when the signified acquires the same clear perception or understanding as the signifier.

As we read the Bible we are involved in a communication experience. The writers of the Bible are the signifiers. They are the ones sending the signal. Since we are the ones reading the message, we are the signified. We are the ones receiving the signal. It is imperative that our goal is to search for the same meaning of the message as the author. It is only when we have the author's clear understanding of the message that we can say that we have achieved a *successful communication experience*.

## Culture

Language is intimately tied up
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Any serious student of the Bible must also be a student of sociology: the systematic study of the development, structure, interaction, and collective behavior of organized groups of human beings. The term used to describe the specialized behavior of a specific group of people is culture. Culture is defined as the whole behavior and technology of any people that is passed on from generation to generation. It is the knowledge, beliefs, morals, laws, religion, customs, concepts, habits, skills, institutions, and any other capabilities of a given people in a given period.<sup>78</sup>

Within each culture we find specific words which are simply bundles of associations which are, for the most part, dictated by the culture we live in; people think, act, and react in ways that have been largely predetermined by their culture. As the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein said, "*The meaning of a word is in its use;*" therefore, to understand the language, we must know how the language was used. Language is intimately tied up with the culture. Culture and the phenomenon of

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<sup>78</sup> Jim Myers, *Introduction to Biblical Analysis*. Destiny Image Publishers, Shippensburg, Pa, 1989. 1.

“cultural relativity” contribute in a significant way to shaping what it is that we continue to apply in any given text.<sup>79</sup>

In one sense a word is like a secret code; only one person knows how to decode the message, and if that person isn’t present the message is useless. During WWII the most successful code used by the United States was the language of the native Indians. “Code talkers” was a term used to describe people who talk using a coded language. Known as Navajo Code Talkers, they specifically were young Navajo men who transmitted secret communications on the battlefields of WWII. At a time when America’s best cryptographers were falling short, these modest shepherders and farmers were able to fashion the most ingenious and successful code in military history.<sup>80</sup> This code was never broken by the Japanese and the Germans because they didn’t have anyone who knew how to translate the language. This distinctive language was part and partial of the Navajo nation and their distinctive way of life.

Words derive meaning from usage and mutual agreement. They are not naturally linked to the things they stand for; for instance, there is nothing inherent in a tomato that demands that it be called a “tomato”; it can just as easily be called a bean or a psalm if everyone in the group has agreed on that combination of sounds. Since the meanings of words or symbols are not inherent, different cultures can, and do, assign different meanings to the same words and phrases. The term ‘corn’ is an example of this. ‘Corn’ in our culture means something different than ‘corn’ in English or Scottish cultures. ‘Breakfast’ to an upper class Jamaican is a meal eaten at nine o’clock in the evening. To Samuel Johnson, in his dictionary in 1755, his bias against the Scottish showed in his personal definition of oats. “**Oats:** A grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland appears to support the people.”<sup>81</sup> His definition of the phrase “to worm” certainly seems to be one barking up the wrong tree. To **worm:** To deprive a dog of something, nobody knows what, under his tongue, which is said to prevent him, nobody knows why, from running mad.<sup>82</sup> I’m sure that in British culture in the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was a distinct meaning and definition. However, two centuries later it seems nonsense and frivolous.

**Any message is dependent on the culture of the author who wrote**

Any message is dependent on the culture of the author who wrote it. The Bible is not written in a vacuum but within a historical and cultural context (Ruth 4:7). ***If you do not have knowledge of the author’s culture, it is impossible to understand his message.*** Trying to apply the American culture of the twentieth century to a message from a first century (or before) Hebrew or Greek culture will cause the message to either be meaningless or have meanings which the author did not intend. In either case, it will be wrong. Do you wonder why Christians are continually wrestling with much of the Bible, trying to interpret some meaning out of it? Take for example the concept of “kingdom of heaven.” Many denominations have taken this to mean “heaven” (a place separate from earth); but the Jews know “heaven” is an euphemism for God; “kingdom of God” is the earthly kingdom over which God rules.

<sup>79</sup> Myers, 1.

<sup>80</sup> <http://www.navajocodetalkers.org/>

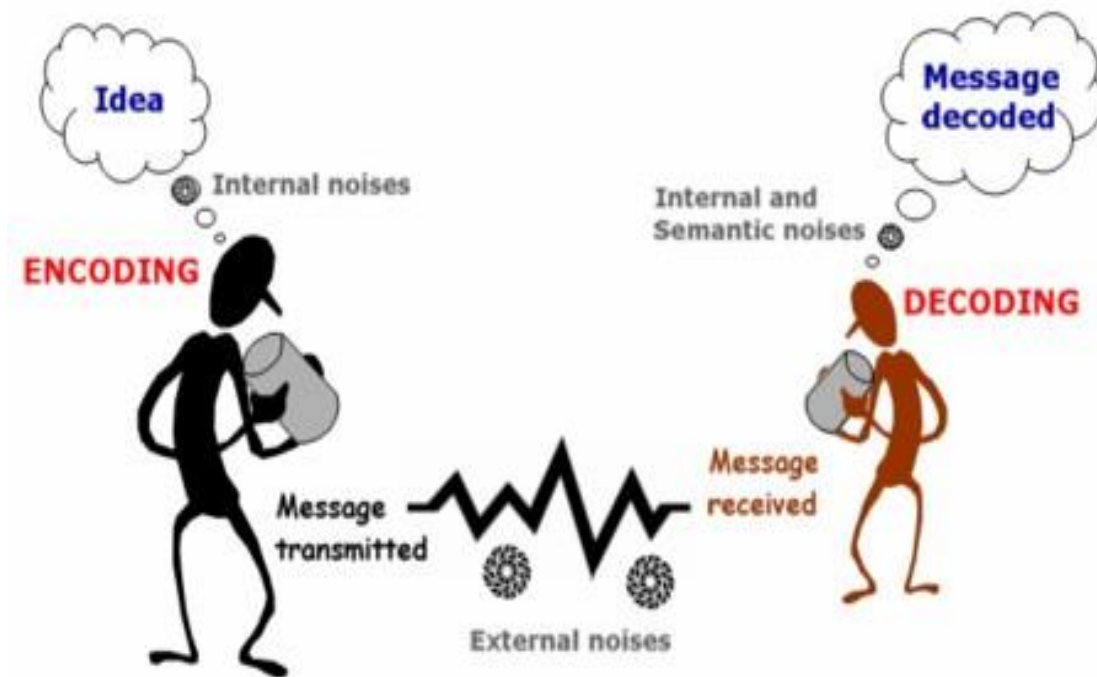
<sup>81</sup> <http://www.samueljohnson.com/definitions.html>

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.samueljohnson.com/definitions.html>

There is only one way in which you can understand the words and that is by learning about the author's life – his religion, morals, beliefs, government, customs, etc. This rule is valid whether or not you believe that the Bible is divinely inspired because if God gave the authors of the Bible the thoughts to write, they would still instantiate them into their own words. This idea agrees with the Jewish idea of prophecy also: "...one should not think of prophecy and inspiration as a kind of divine dictation in which God simply puts words into the prophet's mouth. The message from God is given through the personality of the prophet. God does not make him a passing tool. He lets him glimpse eternal truth, and express it in his own terms."<sup>83</sup>

As you begin your search begin with The *Encyclopedia Judaica* which is a vital reference work for researching the Hebrew culture. Most college libraries will have a copy, and synagogues will almost always have a set. You can find many other books on Hebrew culture and ancient sociological studies in most public libraries. Studies comparing Judaism and Christianity are also very useful in explaining differences in thinking.

We must associate *their meanings* with *their words*. Associating any other meaning with their words creates an unsuccessful communication experience which results in error. In communication jargon it's known as the sender and the receiver. The sender has a coded message that must be decoded by the receiver of the message.



As everyone strives toward associating the author's meaning with the written word, we will see a uniting of many people who had previously been separated because of their different interpretations of scriptures. As we introduce facts into theological

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<sup>83</sup> Louis Jacobs. *The Book of Jewish Practice*. West Orange, N.J.: Behrman House, 1987. 49.



arguments, wrong conclusions will become apparent and our area of debate will be narrowed many times. When we read the book of John, the only thing we want to know is what those words meant to John. What memories did he associate with those words? If we are reading Paul's writings the only thing we want to know is what Paul was thinking as he wrote his words. It is in this way that we look at their words through their eyes. Can you think of a better place to start than with their meanings?

Within the course of communication nearly everyone is cognizant of the fact that nonverbal communication occupies 70% space in the communication pie chart.<sup>84</sup> But since we aren't there looking at the person speaking then the best we can do to understand the mind of God is with the words he has offered us. This should exemplify that such a study isn't exact and errors can multiply quickly. Sincerity, prayer, and humbleness in such a study should show forth from the individual that enters the word of God with fear and trembling.

## **Ethnocentrism**

We tend to scale or rate others by how much they are alike or unlike ourselves. We naturally take for granted that our culture is superior to any other culture. This tendency results in the using of our culture as the yardstick by which we measure all other cultures or people. If the other culture is like our culture than we will probably use terms such as right, good, progressive, superior, chosen or true. If the other culture is not similar to ours we have a tendency to use terms such as wrong, bad, backward, inferior, heathen, barbarian, foreign, or savage.

This practice must be forsaken when we study the Bible. Instead of questioning whether a culture is right or wrong, we must simply observe the customs and concepts of a culture. This not only applies to the Hebrew culture, but the cultures the Jews were in contact with during the writing of the Bible – Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Persian, Assyrian, Philistine, Canaanite, etc. ***We must interpret the words of people in light of their own culture's motives, habits, and values if we are to understand their words as they understood them.***

Something that may be unacceptable in one culture may be acceptable in another culture; for instance, if we turn on our television to the educational channel and watch a National Geographic special on Africa what do we see? We observe a native tribe in their village who are almost totally naked, and we do not get upset because this is acceptable in their culture. If we change the channel and a program comes on showing a group of Americans in their city dressed just like the natives of Africa, we would say this is unacceptable, pornographic, and immoral. The two situations are exactly the same except that the two groups of people represent different cultures. We perceive one situation as right and one as wrong. This perception is a product of the values of our culture. If we read a message from that culture we must replace our values with theirs to gain a true meaning of the message; otherwise, the result will be a complete misunderstanding.

Words which we are very familiar with in our everyday lives may take on new meanings which are very strange to us as we look at these words in light of another

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<sup>84</sup> <http://www.buzzle.com/articles/nonverbal-communication-an-overview.html>

culture. For instance, take the word “marriage”. In our culture a young man and a young woman date for a period of time. Next, they may fall in love with each other and then announce to their parents their decision to marry. Once they have made this announcement they will begin to plan the wedding and honeymoon. The saying, “First comes love, then comes marriage...” is very American. If you told people to forget the “love part,” they would think you were crazy because people should only get married because they are in love. When we hear the word marriage we subconsciously assign the above meaning to the word without even realizing it. This can lead to great error and a definite misunderstanding of the word “marriage” in material translated from another culture. Recently I was very pleased to meet a young woman from Persia. In discussing the cultural differences we focused in on marriage from her culture’s point of view. When she was only fourteen her father contracted for her to marry a man who was thirty-six years of age. Only after the financial details were finalized was she told of the decision. In her culture it was the normal and correct way of getting married. The girl may meet her husband for the first time on her wedding night.

Notice in this example that love was NOT the primary factor – her father and the groom decided her future and then announced it to her. She did have a choice, but it would be very unusual for a daughter to go against her father’s wishes. They believe that, in time, love will come as a result of the act of commitment; whereas, in our American culture love is a prerequisite to marriage. In their culture, financial provisions, a place to live, food and clothing, as well as the groom keeping the bride on the same or a higher social level, are the primary concerns. Being in love is not one of them. Our culture could probably learn something from theirs as many of our divorces result from the lack of commitment to these basics. As you can see the word ‘marriage’ has one bundle of associations for a Persian and a very different one for an American.

If we read a story about the marriage of a Persian girl, we need to evaluate it from the Persian culture’s point of view without judging whether it is right or wrong. We must “think Persian”, not American, if we are to understand their message. Remember, our analysis of a Persian message with the word marriage is not concerned with the fact of whether or not that we think this concept of marriage is right or wrong. We must look at their beliefs, customs, traditions, etc. as if we were part of their culture. We must think of their way of understanding and evaluating their words as a fellow member of the same culture.

Without using their culture as the yardstick to understand their writings, achieving a successful communication experience would be impossible. Note that we are usually quick to recognize ethnocentrism in others and slow to see it in ourselves. We must read the words of the Bible in view of the writer’s motives, values, and habits, and not according to twentieth century American motives, values, and habits. The culture of the writer becomes the yardstick which can be equally used by anyone from any culture to judge the writer’s words. With every one using the same yardstick we can all have the same starting point. Which yardstick do we use as we look at the Biblical text? The answer is “The Hebrew Culture.” Every writer in the Bible was from the Hebrew culture, with the possible exception of Luke. (However, many believe that Luke was a proselyte of the Hebrew religion) In order to understand the words of the Bible we must LOOK THROUGH HEBREW EYES.

**We must think their way,  
understanding and evaluating their  
words as a fellow member of the**

## **Translation calls for a sensitive appreciation of both languages and both cultures**

In translation, the translator must wear two hats: author and reader. First, the translator becomes the reader as he studies the writings of the Bible. The translator must determine what bundle of thoughts the author associated with the symbols (words) as he was writing his message. In order to accomplish this the translator must have a thorough knowledge of the author's language, culture, historical time period, and geographical location. Once the translator becomes satisfied that he has achieved a successful communication experience he must now enter the next phase of translation.

In the second phase, the translator becomes the author as he writes a message to be read by someone else. Now, the translator must have a thorough knowledge of the reader's language and culture. To translate a message from one language into another is very ticklish business. The translator must catch the precise meaning of the words in the original language and then bring that meaning into the reader's language with equal precision; he must do this in such a way that the literary quality of the original is preserved. With some terms a simple translation is not enough. These require not only a translation, but a full definition with explanatory notes.

But the translator is limited to the amount of notes that can be included. The Anchor Bible is the largest Bible ever produced. Its 42 volumes (which will eventually be increased to 66 volumes) contain masses of commentary, but even this much material does not cover every important point. Other Bible commentaries are available also, but in every one, along with facts, you will be getting the commentator's opinion.

**The best way to  
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location of the**

In conventional Bibles, even though the words have been correctly translated from one language to another, the author's meanings may have been left behind. The translators may have done an excellent job, but only if we, as the reader, prepare ourselves will we be able to grasp the correct meaning of the message. If the authors of the Bible were still alive, we could go to them and ask for further information; since this is not the case it becomes our responsibility to prepare ourselves as much as possible. The best way to prepare ourselves is with the facts – by understanding the language, culture, historical time period, and geographical location of the Biblical authors.

Remember the example of the very familiar word “marriage”? In our culture the old saying, “First comes love, then comes marriage...” properly describes the order of events. It is almost impossible to imagine a wedding without the bride and groom being ‘head over heels’ in love with each other. However, in the Hebrew culture at the time of the writing of the Biblical text, we would usually find a bride and groom coming together

because her father and the groom arranged the marriage. Love was, again, not the primary requirement. In some cases the bride and groom had never met before their wedding night. With just this limited information about the word “marriage” we can see the difference in how we picture a Hebrew marriage. Even though the translator correctly translated the word “marriage” into English, the associations connected with the word are entirely different than ours. Without understanding the culture of the people who use the word “marriage,” we could not understand the meaning even if the translator used the correct word.

It would be very helpful if the translator listed the primary characteristics in their footnotes; for example: (1) love does not have to be a prerequisite. (2) Selection of mates made by fathers and groom, not by bride. (3) The groom must be able to meet the basic needs of his bride, such as food, clothing, housing, and money. He must be able to match the living conditions provided by the bride’s father. (4) Groom offers marriage contract to bride. (5) Bride accepts contract. (6) Love is a product of the commitment and years of facing life together.

This meaning becomes very important when we read verses such as Ephesians 5:22-32 which describe our relationship to Christ with him being in the position of the husband and our being in the position of the wife. Terms such as “I was a husband to them”, or “bride of Christ”, take on totally new meanings. Obviously the passage no longer talks about a kind of ‘mushy,’ romantic love. It speaks of a covenant between the couple, in which the husband protects and provides for the bride. The husband offers the contract, and the bride can accept it. This is an example of what happens when you look at the words through their eyes.

As we translate the English Bible into other languages and then translate these translations back into English we get a taste of what is involved in the world of translation. Our first example is the translation of the phrase, “I am sorrowful” into several African languages and then back to English:

- (1) My stomach is heavy.
- (2) My eye is black.
- (3) My liver is sick.
- (4) My heart is rotten.

Other examples of what can happen are:

- (1) “They shook their heads” becomes “Their heads went up and down.”
- (2) “Troubled” becomes “Shivering in one’s liver.”
- (3) “Forgiveness” becomes “Taking a man’s fault out of your heart.”
- (4) “To worship God” becomes “To wag one’s tail before God.”
- (5) “Prophet” becomes “Gods town crier.”
- (6) “Joy” becomes “Song in the body.”

## **What if the translator makes a mistake?**

An example of what can happen when the translator does not recognize the culture behind the message that he is translating can be found in the following example:

Matthew 5:22-23a – “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine EYE BE SINGLE, they whole body shall be full of light. But if thine EYE BE EVIL, thy whole body shall be full of darkness...”

Notice the two terms: EYE BE SINGLE and EYE BE EVIL. In other English translations we see the term “eye be single” replaced by whole, sound, healthy, clear, single, good, etc.—which are practically meaningless (and misleading) in English or Greek. This presents a problem if you have been taught that the above verse was written originally in Greek. We now know from examples like this that the words of Jesus were almost certainly written as they were spoken – in Hebrew, not Greek. However, because only Greek manuscripts survive to this day, the English translators must have assumed they were working with Greek meanings instead of Hebrew. A very interesting point is that these same translators had encountered these same phrases in the Hebrew Old Testament, and in one case translated the term ‘single eye’ totally differently.

Jesus used a rabbinic style of teaching called ‘remez’ or ‘hinting.’ This method was one in which the teacher would quite a few key words from a scripture, or entire groups of passages, which his listeners were very familiar with. Then he would move on without an additional comment. Because his listeners were taught the scriptures from their early childhood, it was not necessary for Jesus to comment on them in detail. However, this presents a problem for a reader who is not aware of what Jesus is doing. Without understanding the Old Testament reference one would not be able to clearly understand Jesus’ teaching. When Jesus was speaking the words found in Matthew 6:22,23, his listener knew that he was referring to several Old Testament scriptures such as Proverb 22:9.

This verse reads:

“He that hath a bountiful (good) eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.”

With a basic understanding of Hebrew writing styles we can immediately recognize that these two phrases are directly related to and modify each other. This is called a parallelism. It is a way of saying the same thing twice, slightly modified each time.

(1) He that hath a bountiful (good) eye. (2) He that give his to the poor.

In other words, we could ask the question, “Who is the one who has a bountiful (Good) eye?” The answer would be, “He that giveth his bread to the poor.” When we literally translate the term ‘bountiful eye’ from Hebrew into English we would say ‘good eye’ instead of ‘bountiful eye.’ In many passages the term ‘an evil eye’ is found in discussion concerning ‘a good eye.’ An example of ‘evil eye’ is found in Deuteronomy 15:9:

“...and thine ye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him naught...”

Remembering the Hebrew style of writing we would write the verse as:

(1) Thine eye be evil against thy poor brother. (2) Thou givest him naught.

Asking the question of “who is the one who has an evil eye” would be answered by “he who givest his poor brother naught.” This appears to be very well known to the translators as they were translating the Old Testament, but not when they were translating the New Testament. I have listened to a number of sermons based on the phrases above which stressed everything from setting priorities, singleness of purpose, and looking only at good things to taking care of your eyes, but until I read “Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus” and the Mishnah and Talmud, I can’t remember anyone speaking on giving to those in need.

**Parallelism – a way of saying the same thing twice, slightly**

## **Words, sentences, and paragraphs must be examined in context**

To achieve a successful communication experience we must examine words in their contextual environment. The word “context” carries with it the idea of something that is woven together. We have all seen pictures of an Indian weaving a basket from straw. It takes many pieces of straw to make one basket, and every very piece of straw has its place and is related to the other pieces of straw. As long as all the pieces of straw are in their proper positions (context) we have a finished basket. Also, we cannot determine the function of this piece of straw without seeing it in its proper contextual environment in the basket.

In the Bible we encounter situation after situation where the central meaning and the contextual meaning are completely unrelated. An example of this can be seen using the word “tree.” We are all familiar with the word “tree” and each of us can form a mental picture of a tree. The central meaning of the word “tree” is “a large perennial plant”; however, if we add the word “olive” to the word “tree” our central meaning becomes “a large perennial plant that bears olives.”

Let’s look at the term “olive tree” in light of its contextual meaning in the Bible. Romans 11:1-24 has verses containing the word “olive tree,” but of course these words do not mean “a large perennial plant that bears olives.” Here “olive tree” bears the metaphorical and contextual meaning of the “children of Israel.” If we used the central meaning “a large perennial plant that bears olives,” these verses would be of no value. We would run into the same problem if we picked up an agricultural manual for olive production and substituted this contextual meaning “the children of Israel” for the central meaning.

When working with the Bible we must examine words, sentences and paragraphs in their immediate context. Immediate context is that context which immediately precedes or follows a discourse, with no intervening context. When examining John 3:16, the minimum reading requirement would be John 3:15 and John 3:17. We must do our best to define the beginning and ending of the subject under discussion as we read the Biblical text. After defining the broad context of a group of verses we can then examine a particular word, sentence, or paragraph in light of its contextual environment.

This is especially true when one deals with the “religion” of any society. The religion of a given race at a given time is, relative to the whole mental attitude of that time. If anyone hesitates to accept this historical induction, I will ask him to take the instance that lies nearest to him, and to consider how he could understand the religious phenomena of our own country in our own time—its doubts, its hopes, its varied enterprises, its learning, its estheticism, and its philanthropies—unless he took account of the growth of the inductive sciences and the mechanical arts, of the expansion of literature, of the social stress, of the commercial activity, of the general drift of society towards its own improvement it would be difficult, if not near impossible, to obtain a clear understanding of anything, especially their religious structure, without this information. We must take account of the breadth and depth of its education, of the many currents of its philosophy, of its love of literature, of its skepticism and its mysticism. We must gather together whatever evidence we can find, not determining the existence or measuring the extent of drifts of thought by their literary expression, but taking note also of the testimony of the monuments of art and history, of paintings and sculptures, or

inscriptions and laws. In doing so, we must be content, at any rate for the presents and until the problem has been more fully elaborated, with the broader feature both of the... world and of the early centuries.<sup>85</sup>

If a word, sentence, or paragraph is removed from its contextual environment, the original meaning can be lost and a new unrelated meaning substituted in its place. It is this problem when one refers to a teaching that has “proof texts”. These texts are being used to prove the speakers/authors point but don’t make that point in the original context. For instance, if one is teaching on the concept of baptism and uses Mark 16:15,16, while completely ignoring verses 17 and 18, proof texting has occurred rendering the listener with the idea that baptism alone, without the aid of miracles, speaking with new tongues, etc. which should occur simultaneously as a sign that this believer carries with him/her the power of God, are no longer prevalent today. Remember, any other meaning being substituted for the original meaning will result in an unsuccessful communication experience. A verse that troubled me for a long time was John 10:10. In a church I attended several years ago, the teacher claimed the “thief” was “the devil” or “Satan.” At that time I had no understanding of how Hebrew culture defined the relationship of God to Satan, and I had never heard of Zoroastrianism or Dualism from which the “God versus Satan” theology originated. Yet, I still questioned why the word “devil” became a substitute for “thief.” The only reason I had for this substitution was the fact that the leaders said it was so, and I wasn’t supposed to ask questions.

As I learned the rudiments of Greek and Hebrew, I decided to analyze this verse. In setting the immediate context of John 10:10, I chose John 10:7-14. Looking for any clues that would define the term “thief,” I noticed in verse eight the terms “thieves and robbers” so I substituted the word “devil” as others had done in verse ten and read verse eight as:

“All that ever came before me are devils and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.”

This, of course, didn’t make much sense so I continued the search and noticed the term “a thief and a robber” in verse 1. In verse 1, I noticed that “a thief and a robber” was defined as “he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way”. I then substituted the term devil and read:

“Verily, verily I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a devil and a robber.”

My old teaching was that the “thief” was Satan quickly being proven to be an erroneous teaching. The next relationship I noticed was the numerous references to the words sheep, sheepfold, and shepherd. I began to see a relationship between the terms thief, robber, and stranger on one side and shepherd, porter and Jesus on the other hand as I examined the verses surrounding John 10:10. In the verses following John 10:10 the relationship was that of thief and hireling as contrasted with Jesus and good shepherd. With a knowledge of Jesus’ use of the rabbinical method of teaching called “remez” (hinting), I found the following verse related to this context:

- (1) Ezekiel 33 – The word “watchman” is related to “porter” in John 10:3.
- (2) Ezekiel 34, Zechariah 10-13, and Micah 2:12,13 all talked about shepherds.

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<sup>85</sup> Edwin Hatch. *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*. London: Williams and Norgate, 1890. 17.

I began to realize that the thief of John 10:10 was related to the shepherds of Israel. They were the ones who were “stealing, killing, and destroying.” My former church’s doctrine told me it was the devil that was doing all those things. After discovering this, I suddenly realized how many Christians believed in a theology in which “the devil” was the source of all their problems, never accepting that people, things, or they could be the source. I had pictured the devil doing things that he wasn’t doing. I was always asking God to help me defeat the Devil when, in fact, this scripture could be used to point out the possibly I was the problem and not some outside, evil force that controlled me.

The purpose of this example is to show you how a word can be misinterpreted, which then allows the Bible to be used to teach something totally foreign to the author’s intentions. Two more situations in which a word is redefined by out-of-context teaching are found in Acts 26:14 and Acts 21:40.

Acts 26:14 says, “...I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue...”

Acts 21:40 says, “...he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue saying...”

These verses clearly state that the language being spoken was Hebrew, but for hundreds of years some people have said “that means Aramaic, and not Hebrew.” Thayer’s Greek/English Lexicon says that the Greek work here clearly means, “Hebrew, the Hebrew language, not that however in which the OT was written but the Chaldee, which at the time of Jesus and the apostles had long superseded it in Palestine.” (G1446) Notice that it does not mean Aramaic, Greek, or Latin. It only takes a few minutes to clarify something within the text from the original language to bypass making a grievous error that could have serious ramifications later. When someone tells you that what you are reading doesn’t mean what it says, it is time to STOP and do some fact finding instead of blindly following the leader. It’s always good to remember what happens when the blind follow the blind.

Context limits the verse to a specific situation; therefore, we must always consider the context of a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph. Keeping a scripture in context guards against taking a verse out of one place, adding it to a verse from another, and drawing conclusions, or saying that these two verses together clearly mean something. Every word, sentence, or paragraph must be examined in context. As students of the Bible, we are only interested in achieving a successful communication experience. Our goal is to discover what the words meant to the person it was originally written to. To look at this in any other way destroys the communication that God wants to have with man and thus mangles the power that we can gain from such contact.

## **The New Greek Church** (Nothing Jewish, Please!)

Looking at how culture affects the meanings of words, we can easily see how the church lost its historical base, and thus Hebraic understanding, in the beginning with the shift from Hebrew to Greek culture, as in this passage:

“Alexandria becomes the brain of Christendom: its heart was yet beating at Antioch, but the West was still receptive only, its hands and arms stretched forth towards the sunrise for further enlightenment. From the East it has obtained the Scriptures and their authentication, and from the same source was deriving the canons, the liturgies, and



the creed of Christendom. The universal language of Christians is Greek. To a pagan emperor who had outgrown the ideas of Nero's time, it was no longer Judaism; but it was no less an Oriental superstition, essentially Greek in its features and dress. "All the churches of the West," says the historian of Latin Christianity, "were Greek religious colonies. Their language was Greek, their organization Greek, their writers Greek, their Scriptures and their ritual was Greek. Through Greek, the communications of the churches of the West were constantly kept up with the East... Thus the church at Rome was but one of a confederation of Greek religious republics founded by Christianity."<sup>86</sup>

For us to bring this whole blurred image we call the Church into focus, we must start at the beginning. The religion which our Lord preached was rooted in Judaism. It came "not to destroy, but to fulfil." There were Jewish minds which had been ripening for them; and so far as they were ripe for them, they received them.<sup>87</sup> Who were the leaders of the church after the ascension of Jesus? What was their culture, language, and geographical location? What external forces were at work outside of the church? What of the Apostolic Fathers and their writings? How about the second or third century Church Fathers?

Usually all I get are blank faces when I ask these questions. We must understand what happened during this period and examine the lives of these men who laid the foundation on which our "modern church" is built; *what they decided has become what we believe*. Their decisions on doctrine have today become the institutions that we assume have existed since the time of Jesus. In some cases self-centered church authorities produced doctrine not for theological reasons, but as political moves that were designed to keep people in control by fear and ignorance.

The first question we must ask is, "What was the culture of the people who wrote the Old Testament?" The answer is – HEBREW! The second question is, "What was the culture of the people who wrote the New Testament?" Again the answer is – HEBREW! (with the possible exception of Luke) The third question is, "What was the culture of Jesus?" The answer again is – HEBREW! The fourth question is, "What was the culture of the apostles?" Again the answer is – HEBREW! The problem comes when we ask the fifth question, "What was the culture of the Apostolic Fathers, the Second Century Apologist and the Third Century Church Fathers? This time, the answer is not a unified group of Hebrews but Greek, Roman, Hebrew, African, etc.? We see a duke's mixture of cultures and people from a conglomeration of former religions. They assigned meanings from their culture and pagan religions to the Hebrew Biblical text, creating a new form of worship that would have been unknown to the Apostles. In the first few hundred year's new meanings – Greek, Roman, Alexandrian – replace the original Hebrew meanings. In a similar way that the Jewish mind was prepared for God and moral principles, so we find that the Greek Christianity of the fourth century was rooted in Hellenism. The Greek minds had been ripening for Christianity and had absorbed new ideas and new motives; but there was a continuity between their present and their past; the new ideas and new motives mingled with the waters of existing currents, and it is only by examining the sources and the volume of the previous flow that we shall understand how it is that the Nicene Creed, rather than the Sermon on the Mount,

**What  
did it  
mean to  
the  
Hebrews**

<sup>86</sup> *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325.* American Reprint of the Edinburgh ed. Grand Rapids Mich.: W.B. Eerdmanns, 1982. vol. 2, 165, 166

<sup>87</sup> Hatch, 19.

formed the dominant element in Aryan Christianity.<sup>88</sup> As far as the Christian Church was concerned the door was slammed shut on the Hebrew culture and with it the ability to clearly understand the words of the Biblical text. Future generations never heard, and, because they never heard, they never understood.

With Constantine's organization of the church, and the divorcing of the Hebrew culture, many questions began to arise concerning the meanings of the words of the Bible. Over the next 1500 years we see meeting after meeting held to define those words, but nobody asks, "What did it mean to the Hebrews that wrote them?"

In 325 A.D. the first ecumenical council was held under the authority of Emperor Constantine the Great. This meeting was the Council of Nicaea, the site of a major break with the Hebrew culture by the church. Constantine the Great was the son of Constantine I, and Helena, whose fervency after her conversion won her sainthood. Constantine the Great was never to any degree depending upon the support of the church. Constantine understood clearly the controlling, educative, and representative power of the church, and it was this political aspect of the church that caught his attention – not the theological considerations. Before the church could be useful it had to be united into one uniform organization. The opportunity to unite the many groups with the church presented itself in the form of an African schism called the Arian controversy. Arian and his followers denied the divinity of Christ. Their theological concepts were deeply rooted in Greek theological speculation beginning with Gnosticism. Their primary teachings seemed to be an attempt to define the relationship of Christ to God. The basic doctrine of Arius may be summarized in the following statements:

- (1) God is unique and unbegotten, and everything outside of God was created from nothing by the will of God.
- (2) The Logos (word) – Christ – is an intermediary between God and the world. He was before time, but not eternal. There was a time when the Word did not exist.
- (3) The Word, therefore, was created. He was made.
- (4) The Incarnate Word is consequently inferior to God but is to be worshiped, since He is exalted above all other creatures and is both Ruler and Redeemer.

There were three parties involved in this schism: the strict Arians, the semi-Arians, and the Alexander-Athanasian party. In the long run, the view of the latter party prevailed with the adoption of a creed that no strict Arian could subscribe to, since it declared that the son is identical in essence with the Father.

As soon as Constantine heard of the troubles within the church he acted to put a stop to them. He immediately sent a message to Alexandria with letters hoping to reconcile the different parties. When it was apparent that this would not produce the desired results, he commanded that "the bishops and those connected with them, should be counted on the donkeys, mules and horses belonging to the public, in order to repair thither." He would hold conferences and discussions, which he felt should settle this problem. In order to insure the attendance, the government paid all expenses, furnished

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<sup>88</sup> Hatch, 19.

free tickets for the public transportations, and even sent carriages for bishops and servants. Constantine arranged that all their wants should be liberally supplied.

This must have been a very unusual situation for many of the bishops because they had experienced some of the cruelest acts of persecution initiated by previous emperors. It had only been twenty-one years ago, Christmas Day, that Emperor Diocletian ordered the doors of the Church of Nicomedia to be barred with the congregation inside. He then ordered it to be burned to the ground resulting in the deaths of 600 people. There were some of the most respected bishops present, such as James (bishop of Antioch), who had power to raise the dead and performed many wonderful miracles. Paul, bishop of Neo-Caesarea, had been deprived of the use of both hands by the application of a red hot iron, deadening the nerves that give motion to the muscles. Some had their right eyes torn out, while others had lost their right arms. We can only imagine the amazement that must have been going through their minds as they were called to this historic meeting.

The council opened on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May for its preliminary discussion, which included not only Christians but non-Christian philosophers who had been asked to contribute their special knowledge. It was week later, July 4<sup>th</sup> before the emperor appeared. A large hall had been prepared with seats all around its sides and a chair and a table in the middle of the hall with an open copy of the gospel displayed. The hall was packed and everyone waited in an atmosphere of expectation. Then the amazing moment arrived when they all saw him – tall, powerful, majestic – robed in purple silk with his pear diadem. In he marched, without any soldiers accompanying him, surrounded by laymen.

He received a welcome from the leaders of the council, but his reply was very brief. He said he “wished nothing more than to find his self among them and he owed thanks to the Savior of the world that his prayer had been answered.” He referred to the importance of agreement and told them that he “their fellow servant” was pained to see dissension in the Church of God which he called “an evil worse than war.” A secretary produced a large bundle of letters from the bishops presenting their various arguments. He then took the bundles and dropped them in a fire where they were destroyed without being read, and the council then proceeded to work on settling the controversy at hand. The results of the Council of Nicea were:

### **The Creed of Faith Established**

*“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of all things visible and invisible, an in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father. He is begotten, that is to say, he is of the substance of God, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten and not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things, both in heaven and on earth, were made. Who, for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and took our nature, and became man. He suffered, and rose again the third day. He ascended into heaven, and will come to judge the living and the dead, and we believe in the Holy Ghost.”*

## **Celebration of Passover commonly called Easter**

The Council assigned the first Sunday after the fourteenth moon following the vernal equinox of celebration of the Passover in all the Christian countries everywhere.

### ***A Partial List of the Twenty Canons of the Council of Nicea***

1. Forbidding the promotion in the church of self-made eunuchs.
2. Forbidding the hasty ordination of new converts to Christianity.
3. Forbidding the clergy to keep female friends in their houses. (In the first ages of the Church some Christians, clergymen and laymen, contracted a sort of spiritual marriage with unmarried ladies, so that they lived together and there was a friendly connection between them for mutual religious advancement. They were known by the name of “sub-introducta” of the Greek “suneisktoi” and “sisters.” That which began in the spirit, however, in many cases ended in the flesh.)
4. Ordinations shall be performed by at least three bishops.
5. Excommunication of either a clergyman or layman by the sentence of a single bishop shall be valid everywhere, till it shall be decided by a provincial council which shall be held twice a year – the first before Lent and the second in the autumn.
6. Gives superiority to the bishop of Alexandria over the bishops and churches of Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis, also to the patriarchs of Rome and Antioch precedence and to metropolitans a veto power over all elections to the Episcopal office within their provinces.
15. BISHOPS, PRESBYTERS, AND DEACONS SHALL REMAIN IN THEIR OWN CHURCHES AND NOT GO TO OTHERS.
16. That presbyters and deacons forsaking their own churches and going to others must be sent back and a bishop shall not ordain those under another bishop without the latter’s consent.
17. All clergymen who loan money to good on interest are to be deposed and their names struck off the list.
18. Deacons shall not present the bread and wine to the presbyters or partake thereof themselves or sit among the presbyters.

Immediately after the close of the Council of Nicaea Emperor Constantine issued an epistle for the benefit of those bishops who were not present. It was this letter that he made the statement that would dissect the Hebrew culture from the Hebrew words of the biblical text.

“LET US THEN, HAVE NOTHING IN COMMON WITH THE JEWS, WHO ARE OUR ADVERSARIES. ANOTHER WAY HAS BEEN POINTED OUT BY OUR SAVIOR...THEREFORE, THIS IRREGULARITY MUST BE CORRECTED, IN ORDER THAT WE MAY NO MORE HAVE ANYTHING IN COMMON WITH THE PATRICIDES AND MURDERERS OF OUR LORD.”

Remember the words of the great lexicographer Samuel Johnson – “*But what makes a word obsolete, more than general agreement to forbear it? And how shall it be continued, when it conveys an offensive idea or recalled again into the mouths of mankind, when it has once by disuse become unfamiliar, and by unfamiliarity unpleasing.*” The leaders of the church, along with the highest government leader of the land, agreed to this statement. The attitude was set and the taste of anything Jewish was

bitter in the mouth of the Christian church. The church now had to search for new associations to attach to Hebrew words. Over the next fifteen hundred years the church would have many Councils to define and redefine the theology of the church, but never did they sever the Greek meanings and reattach the original Hebrew associations.

You should retain two main points from this article regarding how to study:

(1) Knowing that some of your theology could be based on error or false teachings, such as from past church authorities making political moves, go back and look at the history of your church leaders and the leaders of churches before yours. Evaluate what you believe, then keep what sounds reasonable to you and disregard the rest. (Actually this is a continual process and not a one-time change.)

(2) Learn how to use the Law of Language, and learn Hebrew culture so that you can know what the scriptures meant in the original language and cultures. The greatness of this hermeneutical approach is that you can test any doctrine by these principles.

It has been my goal to present the Law of Language in such a way that it becomes a basic tool set used by scholars, and non-scholars, to study the Biblical text. With a basic knowledge of the author's culture, locations, and historic time period, you can seriously study the Bible and know what the Bible is talking about. Just as a carpenter needs his hammer, saw, screw driver, etc. to build a house, a person need to understand concept such as signifier, signified, idioms, parallelisms, ethnocentrism, culture, etc. to build his knowledge of the Bible. The only way to understand what is written is to look at the Bible – **THROUGH THEIR EYES!**

## **Basic Bible study aids**

*Your personal Bible* (make sure it's a translation and not a paraphrase)

*Interlinear Bible*

*Thayer's Greek Lexicon*

*Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew English Lexicon*

*Strong's Concordance*

*Word Study Concordance*

## **History**

*Encyclopedia Judaica*

*Our Father Abraham*

*Everyman's Talmud*

*Mishnah*

*Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*

## **Geography**

*Bible Atlas*

## **Archaeology**

*Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*

*Biblical Archaeology Review*

## **Grammar**

*TDNT- Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*

## **Encyclopedia**

*INSBE- International Standard Biblical Encyclopedia*

## *Beginning the study*

Look at the scripture - a passage that you are reading. What part interests you that you want to research? Is it a group of words, an entire passage, or is there one word, or one concept, that you think needs some attention? Even in a passage the words need to be looked at individually to get the entire meaning from a linguistic approach.

The passage that I'm going to look up is \_\_\_\_\_

1. Research the word by using your ***Interlinear Bible***. Notice the numbers above the words or phrases in each scripture. These numbers are associated with Strong's Concordance and will aid you in looking up the text in several Greek and Hebrew Lexicons.
  - a. ***Strong's Concordance***
    - i. Look the word up.
    - ii. Notice the number associated with the word.
    - iii. Be sure that the number associated with the word is in the passage that you are looking up. Many words are used in a variety of ways; thus, make sure that what you're looking at is the meaning for that particular context.
  - b. ***Word Study Concordance***
    - i. Using *Strong's Concordance* look up the number associated with the word in both *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* and *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon*. (others can be used but these two can give you the basic meaning of most of the words)
    - ii. Put a piece of paper on the page with the number that you've looked and go to the introduction of the book. Here the section on pp. will tell you how to use the section that contains your word.
    - iii. Read each section to see how many times the word is used and what reference works you can use to look up each word.
    - iv. Look up the word using the various tools available with this concordance (listed in the introduction) and make notes denoting how many times it's used with the same understanding that it has in your original context. Note also the original meaning and what it means in its original context.
    - v. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* will help give an extensive background of all of the words in both Greek and Hebrew and any other associated languages.
  - c. Once the meaning of the word is firmly understood you enter into the historical, cultural part of your study.
    - i. Since all words are part and parcel of the culture in which they are couched it is vital that you understand this important part of their placement.
    - ii. This is probably the most difficult part of the process but the most revealing and rewarding.

- iii. You should start with your archaeology book "*Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*" and see if you can find any association with the culture, city, people, that the scripture was either said by or to. From this point you'll next go to "*Everyman's Talmud*" (a thumbnail sketch of an enormous corpus of literature of commentary on Jewish law). The context will determine whether this book will be valuable. Since most of the Biblical text is couched either in a Jewish city, said by a Jew, or has a Jewish background this text is invaluable in your search.
- iv. Now you're basically on your own. The rest of the books are valuable only in certain areas of your search. "*Our Father Abraham*" is an excellent book on words, scriptures and concepts with a strong Jewish connection. "*Understanding the Difficult words of Jesus*" deals with various passages within the New Testament. "*Mikveh*" deals with a study of baptism in a Jewish setting and how that was developed to become Christian baptism that is discussed in the book of Acts. Others books involved in this study are available in much the same way as your study narrows. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* is probably the most extensive work dealing with Jewish concepts, ideas and words.
- v. The various websites that we'll look at have numerous articles that may deal with the words or concepts in articles written by both Jewish and Christian scholars trying to discover the same thing that you are looking for. Remember that they are just men/women searching, as are you, for a better understanding of the text itself. Don't take their words as the final word, but do look seriously at what they have to say in light of their research and scholarship and see if it lines up with what you have done yourself.



## **Hermeneutics class books**

*(Most books are available at "Christian Book Distributors")*

### **1. Strong's Concordance - (#1)**

Retail Price: \$24.99

**CBD Price: \$14.99**

Save \$10.00 (40%)

CBD Stock No: WW50559

ISBN: 0785250557

ISBN-13: 9780785250555

### **2. New Brown-Driver Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon (#5)**

Retail Price: \$34.95

**CBD Price: \$19.99**

Save \$14.96 (43%)

CBD Stock No: WW32060

ISBN: 1565632060

ISBN-13: 9781565632066

### **3. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon (#4)**

Retail Price: \$24.95

**CBD Price: \$13.99**

Save \$10.96 (44%)

CBD Stock No: WW32095

ISBN: 1565632095

ISBN-13: 9781565632097

### **4. The Word Study Concordance (#3)**

Amazon.com

19.95 and up

### **5. The Interlinear Hebrew-English-Greek Bible (#2)**

Retail Price: \$69.95

**CBD Price: \$34.99**

Save \$34.96 (50%)

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